

# Asian Highlands Perspectives 10







# ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES

VOLUME 10

*Edited by*

CK Stuart

Gerald Roche

Tshe dbang rdo rje རྩ་བཀའ་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོ་ 才项多杰

Timothy Thurston

Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་འཛིན་ཆེན་པོ་

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**Front Cover:** A young woman preparing lunch for her family inside a yak-hair tent. This photo was taken in Rdza stod County མཚོ་ཕྱོག་ཡུལ་ཤུལ་བོད་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ་རྫོང་ 青海玉树藏族自治州杂多县 by Tshe mdo thar on 9 September 2010.

**Back Cover:** A metal-worker in the street near Sku 'bum Monastery. This photo was taken in Huangzhong County མཚོ་ཕྱོག་ཟི་མིང་གྲོང་ཁྱེར་སྐུ་བུ་འབུམ་རྫོང་ 青海西宁市湟中县 by Tshe mdo thar on 5 April 2008.

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## FROM THE EDITORS

*Asian Highlands Perspectives* welcomes submissions that allow us to better hear and understand voices from the highlands of Asia relating their experiences—what they mean and how they are understood—all with a view to enriching our knowledge of this vast area. We hope to feature autobiographical accounts and studies of songs, jokes, tongue twisters, weddings, divorce, funerals, 'dirty' stories and songs, love songs, rituals of romance, illness, medicine, healing, clothing, music, rites of passages, orations, gender, herding techniques, agricultural practices, trading, flora and fauna, the annual cycle of work in rural communities, 'development', language, religion, conflict, architecture, education, apprenticeships, art, and everything else that informs us.

Prospective authors are welcome to use theory to interpret what they report, however, the editors are particularly interested in careful, detailed, contextualized descriptions revealing local meanings of what is being described, and how this connects with relevant publications. It is especially hoped that local scholars who lack access to educational systems emphasizing theory will contribute. All submissions are peer reviewed. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* is available as at-cost hardcopy as well as on-line. Published authors receive PDF versions of their work.

*CK Stuart*

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*Tshe dbang rdo rje*

*Timothy Thurston*

*Rin chen rdo rje*

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CK Stuart; Gerald Roche; Tshe dbang rdo rje ཚེ་དབང་རྡོ་རྗེ། 才  
项多杰; Timothy Thurston; and Rin chen rdo rje རིན་ཆེན་རྡོ་རྗེ།

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THE A MDO TIBETAN RDO SBIS *LAB TSE* RITUAL

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ABSTRACT

The origin of a specific A mdo *lab tse* established in 1989, offerings to local mountain deities during the annual ritual venerating the three local mountain deities to whom the *lab tse* is dedicated and their origins, and related activities for a two-to-three-day period annually in summer are described.

KEY WORDS

*lab tse*, mountain deity, Rdo sbis, Xunhua

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure One. Stong ri (right) and Dar rgyal's (left) picture displayed on the wall of the Rdo sbis *lab tse* altar (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Two. A Gung ye *thang ka* displayed at the 'Dod rtse Village shrine (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Three. A Gung ye *thang ka* displayed at the 'Dod rtse Village shrine (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).

Figure Four. A Gung ye picture displayed on the wall of the Rdo sbis *lab tse* altar (Kelsang Norbu, 2006).















## INTRODUCTION

The term *lab tse*<sup>1</sup> often refers to a framework into which birch branches and ceremonial, long pieces of wood resembling arrows are placed as offerings to mountain deities. *Gzhi bdag* 'owner of the territory', *yul lha* 'deity of the local territory', and *skyes lha* 'natal deity' are terms Rdo sbis locals use to refer to mountain deities. The term '*yul lha*' indicates a mountain deity protecting a certain area, village, or cluster of villages. *Skyes lha* 'natal deity' is the deity of one's birthplace. After moving to a new location, the natal deity continues to provide protection.<sup>2</sup> Mountain worship and *lab tse* are an

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<sup>1</sup> Different spellings with similar pronunciations are used for this term in literature: *lab tse*, *la btsas*, and *la rtse*. The terms *la tse* and *la btsas* in written Tibetan lack meaning when parsed while *la rtse* literally means 'mountaintop'. Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las (2002:1948) and Zhang Yisun (1993:2747), both prestigious Tibetan dictionaries, use *la btsas*. 'Gyur med (b. 1935, interview), who also prefers this spelling, believes that this word has its roots in Zhang zhung, an ancient culture and kingdom of western and northwestern Tibet associated with Bon. 'Gyur med further says that the following three words are distinguished by location: the altar on a mountaintop is *gye tu*, at a mountain pass is *la btsas*, and the altar at the foot of a mountain is *dpa' mkhar* 'hero's castle'. Based on such taxonomy, the final term is accurate for the focus of this paper in Rdo sbis, however, locals use *lab tse* or *la btsas* (the local pronunciation is the same) as a general term regardless of an altar's location (see Berounský and Slobodník (2003) for a discussion of related terms).

<sup>2</sup> In nearby Bla brang (Xiahe) in Gansu Province, a family immediately chooses a local *gzhi bdag* as the newborn's natal deity and offers *bsang* if the infant is a boy. The natal deity is then the newborn's lifelong *skyes lha*. Members of a single family may obtain different natal deities. Consequently, one may have a new *yul lha* while retaining the same *skyes lha*. When the author's son was born in Zi ling in 2009, the

integral part of local Tibetan culture.

A *lab tse* ritual and associated ceremonies and beliefs in Rdo sbis are described based on oral interviews and Kalsang Norbu's participation in the Rdo sbis *lab tse* ritual five times. Rdo sbis (Daowei) is a Tibetan township in Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, PR China. It has an area of approximately 600 square kilometers and is located in a valley surrounded by Gung ye, Stong ri, and Dar rgyal mountain ranges in the south, north, and east, respectively. The name Rdo sbis literally means 'stone tent', derived from a tent-shaped rock in the upper valley.

The *lab tse* in Rdo sbis was established in 1989. Monks and laymen, including government employees and students, participate in the annual *lab tse* ritual. The monks chant and offer ritual offerings to the mountain deities in ceremonies that include chanting, praying for blessings, dispelling illness and disasters, burning *bsang*,<sup>3</sup> and offering *mda*' 'ceremonial arrows'<sup>4</sup> to the deities. This is followed by

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infant's maternal grandparents in Bla brang phoned the father early the next day and suggested they choose a *skyes lha* in their home area. With the father's consent, they immediately selected a local deity as the new baby's *skyes lha* and offered it *bsang*. This practice of designating a natal deity soon after birth is not practiced in Rdo sbis where a local deity from whom the whole community seeks protection is automatically viewed as the natal deity of a newborn. There are stories in Bla brang about children without designated *skyes lha* being abducted by evil spirits, evidenced by a child leaving home and playing alone in the mountains for several days.

<sup>3</sup> Burning juniper branches with *rtsam pa* 'roasted barley flour' as food for deities. It is believed mountain deities consume food by inhaling the odors of burnt offerings.

<sup>4</sup> A pine pole ten to fifteen meters in length fashioned into an arrow with a sharp end and fletching made of attached wood boards. The pole and fletching are colorfully painted.

such secular activities as Tibetan musical performances by a professional Tibetan musical team invited from neighboring Tibetan regions,<sup>5</sup> a horserace, traditional dances and songs, and *la gzhas* 'love song' performances. The monastic community plays an important role in the religious elements of the ritual. The local government invites and pays for invited performers and maintains order as villagers place ceremonial arrows into the *lab tse* frame. A horserace was a part of the entertainment until the late 1990s, when it was discontinued due to the few horses in the vicinity; the horses had been replaced by tractors and motorcycles.

Rdo sbis is located in a valley surrounded by mountains. Gung ye Mountain Range (4,438 meters above sea level) in the southwest runs southeast-northwest; Stong ri (4,095m) in the north runs southeast-northwest, approximately ten kilometers from Gung ye Mountain; and Mount Dar rgyal (4,217m) in the east runs northeast-southwest, connecting Gung ye and Stong ri mountain ranges. The valley runs southeast-northwest and is at higher elevation in the southeast than in the northwest. The Rdo sbis River divides the valley into northwestern and southeastern parts, referred to locally as the sunny side and the shady side, respectively. Several branch ridges extend from the Gung ye and Stong ri ranges, forming small open valleys. Twenty-four villages,<sup>6</sup> eleven monasteries, and one nunnery<sup>7</sup> are

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<sup>5</sup> The Gesar Singing Group (Ge sar nang ma; Gesa'er yanyi zhongxin) from Zi ling was invited and performed in 2005, 2006, and 2007. About eight singers sang traditional and modern songs in both Tibetan and Chinese for two days during each of these years. Performers were not invited in 2008 and in 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Lcang shar, Hor ron po, Hor grol ba, Ser grong, Khis dmar, Dgu rus, Stod ra, Mdo ba, 'Obs dmar, 'Obs dmar mdo, Gter kha lung, Zam tshang, Nya mo, and 'Ong rgyal in the north; and Sprel lung, Nyin pa, 'Dod rtse, Ra skor, Bla ma'i lung ba, Sde sman, Gshong ba, Rgyal tshang, Dmag dpon, and 'Dan ma in the south.



located in these valleys as well as in the main valley near the river. The mountain deities' names are the three mountains' names (Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye) and are important local protectors. Individual villages may also venerate and sacrifice to other mountain deities, e.g., 'O po che in Sprel lung Village; and Bkra rdzas in Bsam tshang and Bong rgya villages. In general, while these three mountain deities are shared deities for the region, villages often consider the geographically nearest deity to be their own particular protector. Those in the east near Dar rgyal venerate and seek help from Dar rgyal, Gung ye is venerated by villages in the south, and Stong ri is worshipped by villages in the north.

Sacrificing to mountain deities is a required community event during which attendants pray for good harvests, abundant livestock, peace, and prosperity. The event also is a grand regrouping in ethnic and local identity with natives living outside the region returning to maintain ties and reconnect with their natal area. Establishing a harmonious relationship between the three mountain deities encourages people to minimize internal conflict and reaffirm social and communal solidarity.

Attendants wear Tibetan clothes, socialize, and enjoy themselves in numerous informal gatherings. Singing love songs is particularly favored by teenagers and young adults. In late afternoon, youths gather, frequently in gender groups by villages, on meadows near the river and sing love songs. Usually a group of men from one village sings with a group of women from another village in a competition in singing rather than an expression of real love, although the content of the love songs is romantic. Young men search for sexual partners during these nights.

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<sup>7</sup> Rdo sbis grwa tshang, Lcang shar, Bis ri, Ngo ma, Gter kha lung, Nya mo, Sprel lung, Rtsi rkyang, 'Dod rtse, Gdong sna, and Dmag dpon, and 'Dan ma chod rten kha Nunnery.

## ORIGIN OF STONG RI, DAR RGYAL, AND GUNG YE

### Stong ri

The meaning of the name of this mountain varies according to its spelling. Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:789-790) writes:

The mountain Dung ri (Conch-shell Mountain) is a karmic mountain shaped like a right-turning conch; or it is called Stong ri (Thousand Mountain) as it is surrounded by 1,000 small mountains.

Stong ru '1,000 soldiers' is used by Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1920-1951) who writes (1990:286) that in the year 659, this area was the site of a battle during which 1,000 Tibetan soldiers defeated a Chinese army of 80,000. Da rgyal mang po rje, the Tibetan military commander, was killed during this conflict and his spirit became Dar rgyal Mountain Deity (discussed later).

Local informants cannot explain the origin of Stong ri Mountain Deity—although it is generally agreed that it is a female deity who has much treasure as indicated by her name, Gter gyi bdag po 'Lord of Treasure'.<sup>8</sup>

A picture displayed on the *lab tse* altar<sup>9</sup> depicts Stong ri with a compassionate feminine white face, riding a white horse, wearing a red Buddhist shawl over a blue robe, holding a blazing jewel (*nor bu me 'bar*) in her right hand, a jewel (*nor bu*) in her left hand, and carrying a bow-case and quiver of arrows.

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<sup>8</sup> She is not referred to as *bdag mo*, the feminine form of *bdag po*.

<sup>9</sup> A square stone frame wall (with sides ten meters long and three meters high) holds *mda'* offered to the deities. Photographs of *thang ka* of the three deities are displayed in the small box in the front wall.

When the author visited Tsha phug Village in 1999,<sup>10</sup> a Tibetan area fifty kilometers west of Mount Stong ri, local elders said that Stong ri is a Salar mountain deity. Salar live adjacent to Stong ri. Tsha phug residents refer to the mountain as Salar Dung ri dkar po 'White Conch-shell Mountain of the Salar', and believe it is still growing. They contend that Rdo sbis Tibetans were oppressed by this mountain deity and consequently the reincarnate lama Gser khang pa blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho (1840-1908) built a *dus 'khor* (Kalachakra) stupa to limit its growth.<sup>11</sup>

Stong ri g.yu mtsho (Stong ri Turquoise Lake; Mengda Tianchi), located in a forested valley north of Mount Stong ri, is considered a sacred lake belonging to Stong ri Mountain Deity. Local Tibetans visit it in summer, beseech the deities for wealth, burn *bsang*, and circumambulate the lake.

### Dar rgyal

Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:790) describes Mount Dar rgyal:

A myes<sup>12</sup> Dar rgyal, the high rocky mountain shaped like a three-folded *nor bu*, where Dar rgyal dgung blon spun gsum (the Three Brother Key Ministers of the empire) are said to dwell.

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<sup>10</sup> Tsha phug (Chafu) Tibetan Township, Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Qinghai Province.

<sup>11</sup> This stupa is in Dkyil shar Tibetan Village, Shong zhan (Xiongxiang) Township, Hualong Hui Autonomous County. Rnye blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan and Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho note the construction of this stupa but do not mention it preventing Stong ri's growth (1996:150-154).

<sup>12</sup> A *myes* 'grandfather' or 'ancestor' is applied to the local mountain deity, as is the case with A myes rma chen, whom Mgo log people believe is their ancestor.

The author omits the names of the other two 'brothers'. '*Spun*', as used in this context, refers to 'comrades' and not biological 'brothers'. Dar rgyal spun gsum 'Three Dar rgyal Brothers' is commonly used locally. Locals know no other name for the brothers. Local accounts suggest Dar rgyal was a Chinese general born during the Zhou Dynasty (1050 BC-256 BC).

Bka' ma mkha' 'bum attempts to connect Dar rgyal to a reference in a Dunhuang manuscript, but local people are unaware of the following account (2009:30-31):

In 659 A.D., the Tibetan military commander, Da rgyal mang po rje, was killed in war when 1,000 Tibetan soldiers defeated a Chinese army of 80,000 in Mtsho nag stong ru 'Black Lake Stong ru'. His soldiers built a tomb for him on Mount Dar rgyal. His soul then resided in Mount Dar rgyal and became Dar rgyal Mountain Deity.

Dar rgyal is represented riding a white horse and clad in white clothing. He wears a sharp-tipped felt hat. Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba<sup>13</sup> and A myes rma chen mountain deities wear similar hats.

In the picture displayed in the wall of the *lab tse* altar, Dar rgyal wears white clothing, armor, and a yellow felt hat. He holds a spear in his right hand and a jewel in his left. He is mounted on a red horse.

An informant said that Dar rgyal was a *dge bsnyen* or *upasaka*<sup>14</sup> during the Chinese Zhou Dynasty, was good-hearted, and very kind to people. He is commonly called Dar rgyal dge bsnyen chen mo 'Great Upasaka Dar rgyal'.

The only Han Chinese village in Rdo sbis is Rgya mkhar (Qitaibao). Village ancestors are locally said to have migrated from present-day Zhejiang Province in south China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and brought their

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<sup>13</sup> See Nebesky-Wojkowitz (1993:161-165) for more on Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba.

<sup>14</sup> A layman or laywoman who has sworn to not kill, lie, steal, take intoxicants, and engage in sexual misconduct.

local deity, Chang Yutian, with them, who then dwelt on Mount Dar rgyal and became the mountain deity of the area. The shrine-keeper refused a request in 2008 to photograph the deity displayed in the Rgya mkhar Village shrine on the grounds that this deity is wrathful, narrow-minded, and dislikes disturbances. He added that Chang Yutian is quick to respond to requests for help and makes trouble for those who do not keep promises of making offerings after being helped.

A small, sacred lake located atop Dar rgyal Mountain is thought to contain much grain and treasure and is regarded as Dar rgyal's property. Rdo sbis inhabitants, mostly young men and women, climb steep paths to visit the lake on the seventeenth day of the sixth month of the Chinese lunar calendar,<sup>15</sup> two days after the Rdo sbis *lab tse* ceremony. Once at the lake, they burn *bsang*, and throw *gter khug* 'treasure bags'<sup>16</sup> and coins into the lake as offerings to the deity. It is believed such offerings bring prosperity and good fortune to one's family. The author witnessed hundreds of young people, many of them middle school students hoping to pass school exams, enroute to the lake in 2008.

Mountain deities are often viewed as male and lakes near them are seen as their female consorts (Karmay 1998:432). However, this is not the case for the female Stong ri and the male Dar rgyal. The lakes near them are considered to be their property.

### Gung ye

Tshe tan zhabs drung (1987:790) writes, "The (Mountain) A myes Gu'u ye,<sup>17</sup> where the empire's brave minister Nian Gengyao('s spirit) dwells." Nian (1679?-1726) was a Qing Dynasty Chinese general during the reign of the Yongzheng

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<sup>15</sup> Local Tibetans use the Chinese lunar calendar.

<sup>16</sup> Small, closed white cloth bags containing approximately one kilo of wheat or barley grain.

<sup>17</sup> 'Gu'u ye' is a local Tibetan term used for Gung ye.

emperor (1723-1736). During Nian's lifetime, his troops destroyed several monasteries in the Mtsho sngon area in the course of quelling rebellion.<sup>18</sup> Nian was aware of information that convinced him Yongzheng's enthronement was inappropriate.<sup>19</sup> Eventually, Yongzheng ordered his execution. Afterwards, Nian's spirit returned to the emperor's palace, appeared in the emperor's dreams, and intimidated him. Subsequently, the Imperial Preceptor, Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje (1717-1786), subjugated the spirit.<sup>20</sup>

According to a *bsang*-offering text<sup>21</sup> dedicated to Gung ye and commonly chanted in 'Dod rtse Village and, according to two *thang ka* in 'Dod rtse Village Temple, A myes Gung ye Mountain Deity has a brown scowling face and wide-open eyes with knitted eyebrows. He brandishes a spear adorned with a red flag in his right hand and wears armor and a helmet decorated with a plume of vulture feathers or with flags. He carries a tiger-skin bow-case and a leopard-skin quiver. He rides a white horse and is extolled as

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<sup>18</sup> Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma (1989:77).

<sup>19</sup> Emperor Kangxi (1645-1722) left a letter read after his death, commanding that his fourteenth son succeed him. However, Yongzheng, the fourth son, and his followers managed to change the Chinese characters reading "the fourteenth son" to "the fourth son" and subsequently, Yongzheng succeeded the throne. Later, Yongzheng ordered the execution of those who knew of this event in fear of it being revealed. Spence (2010) writes, "General Nian Gengyao, once the emperor's favorite but driven at the end to commit suicide on the emperor's order."

<sup>20</sup> Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma (1989:16). The author does not give the accounts of subjugation in this biography of Lcang skya rol pa'i rdo rje. However, stories of several successive previous lives of this Imperial Preceptor who subjugated Nian's previous lives that were harmful beings are given.

<sup>21</sup> A handwritten copy of this text was consulted in 'Dod rtse Village.

the general of 10,000 soldiers. One of his eight sons is Dgra 'dul nor bu. His wife is Rgya bza' mon sde yum chen drag mo.<sup>22</sup>

In another picture, Gung ye has a long thin moustache and a beard, rides a red horse, grips a broadsword in the right hand, and wears a sleeveless leopard skin over a red shirt.

A mountain deity may have a genealogical relationship with the people they protect, is usually depicted as a traditional warrior, and is worshiped as a protective ancestor or ancestral deity. However, there are notable variations for the three Rdo sbis mountains. Although the title *A myes* is applied, local mountain deities are worshiped as protectors, not as ancestors or ancestral deities.

## TERRITORY AND MOVEMENT OF MOUNTAIN DEITIES

Each of the three mountain deities has its own territory and adherents. Attempts to invade the territory of the others is deemed provocative and may lead to conflict between the mountain deities involved. The following account of a conflict between Gung ye and Stong ri illustrates this:

Stong ri g.yu mstho, a small lake north of Mount Stong ri, was once at the foot of Mount Gung ye and belonged to Gung ye Mountain Deity. Stong ri stole the lake, which resulted in endless hostility between the two. Traces of this event are evident in notches atop Mount Stong ri that are believed to be scars left by Gung ye's arrows and the fact that Gung ye is a rocky mountain that boulders tumble down, explained by Stong ri having clawed Gung ye's face. This further suggests that Stong ri is female because

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<sup>22</sup> Rgya bza' = Chinese princess.



women scratch when they fight.<sup>23</sup>

Mountain deities travel swiftly around the earth at great speed. A long song from Rdo sbis area known as *Ra ru mkho a bo khro skyabs 'bum*, sung in 1998 by Tshe go (1905-?), a local woman, narrates the hardships of mountain deities. The song mentions a local businessman who was killed by robbers on the way home. His spirit later became a mountain deity as illustrated by the following:

I (Mountain Deity) wear out a pair of metal boots in the  
daytime,  
I wear out a pair of stirrups every night.  
I wear out a suit of clothes within a month,  
And my horse wears out its hooves within a year.

A mountain deity is thought to come at great speed when his adherents request help, as illustrated by the following account:

Once a mountain deity was called by an adherent and found upon arrival that the person's problem was constipation. The mountain deity later complained, "You can't go everywhere you are asked for help. Sometimes you are even asked to help with constipation!"

However, not every mountain deity is so responsive, as this account illustrates:

A lags bzang po, a reincarnate lama from Reb gong (Tongren), visited Mount Putuo (Putuoshan) in Zhejiang Province and became involved in a dispute between two powerful Chinese groups. One group detained him. He summoned Reb gong's mountain deities but none

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<sup>23</sup> This and other local accounts lacking specific references are narratives the author has heard that are widely told in the local area.

responded. Finally, he summoned Dar rgyal. Dar rgyal replied immediately that he would soon come. A short while later, a bomb exploded outside the prison, blowing a hole in the prison wall through which he escaped. A lags bzang po offered *bsang* to show his appreciation to this mountain deity when he got home.

Other accounts suggest that mountain deities are limited by the distance that they may be asked to travel. A local monk offered this account:

When a person risks their life crossing the China/ Nepal border, they summon the local mountain deity for assistance. However, no indications of the local mountain deity helping them are apparent at that very moment. However, if they summon a local *chos skyong* or *darmapala* (Buddhist protector), it does help. This means it is difficult for mountain deities in their native A mdo to reach distant Dbus gtsang to help their adherents.

This fact was confirmed by a worried family that invited a *lha ba* 'spirit medium'<sup>24</sup> to their home to learn about a relative who had gone south. The mountain deity spoke through the *lha ba* saying that he had already escorted the person all the way to A mdo County, Tibet Autonomous Region, and had then returned.

### RDO SBIS *LAB TSE* RITUAL

The *lab tse* consists of stones around a wood frame into which are inserted *mda'*, birch tree branches adorned with colorful wool pieces, and colorful cloth printed with *rlung rta* and scriptures. It is an offering site to mountain deities. *Lab tse* are usually found on mountaintops and ridges and more rarely at the foot of a mountain and edges of cultivated

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<sup>24</sup> The only local spirit medium we were aware of in 2010 was in 'Ong rgyal Village.

fields.

People explain *lab tse* function in various ways. Stuart et al. (1995) and Xing (1992) have suggested that *lab tse* may trace their origins to Tibetan troops passing by long ago constructing wooden frames for holding their weapons and Tibetan soldiers building them atop mountains as signs of control after occupying new territory. The Tibetan Kingdom disintegrated in the ninth century, and there were frequent battles between tribes. To maintain peace and restore friendly relationships between tribes, weapons were collected and put on summits in plain view to show that there was credible peace between tribes, and were also built to store the weapons mountain deities could use in battles.

Dpal ldan bkra shis and Stuart (1998) suggest that because mountain deities drift around the earth several times a day, the *lab tse* are their dwellings and places to make offerings to them. This is also confirmed by informant Grags pa who said that the mountain deities travel at great speed around the earth three times a day. The *lab tse* are a place to rest during their tiring travel.

*Lab tse* are also believed to be the palaces of mountain deities, who are often military commanders and fond of weapons, thus *mda'* are ideal offerings. Shouting, shooting guns, setting off firecrackers, and horseraces are enjoyed by mountain deities.

Dge 'dun chos 'phel (1990:221-222) contended that *btsan* were images of ancient kings and insightfully suggests:

Imitating the Red Palace (Pho brang dmar po)<sup>25</sup> with arrows and spears adorned on top built by Khri btsun,<sup>26</sup> red temples adorned with spears and arrows and *labtse* (*la rtse*) for residences of *btsan* deities were built.

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<sup>25</sup> The red structure in the upper middle portion of the Potala Palace is said to be Srong btsan sgam po's (617-650) palace.

<sup>26</sup> Princess Bhrikuti Devi came from Nepal in 634 to marry Srong btsan sgam po.

A shared notion is that *lab tse* are a mountain deity's dwelling or post.

### Origin of the Rdo sbis *lab tse*

Rdo sbis *lab tse* was built in 1989. Earlier, the three mountain deities were venerated and rituals were held separately: the upper villages in the east held a *lab tse* festival for Dar rgyal every summer; villages in the south had their own *lab tse* altars and annual rituals for Gung ye; and villages in the north had *lab tse* altars and rituals for Stong ri. There were three *lab tse* altars for Gung ye in 'Dod rtse Village in the south. Rituals were done for each annually and a sheep was sacrificed to the mountain deity.

In 1989, a unified ritual for the three most important local mountain deities mentioned above began. This *lab tse* serves the twenty-four Tibetan villages in Rdo sbis, therefore the *lab tse* altar or the *lab tse* ritual is called the Rdo sbis *lab tse*. It is also called Rdo sbis *spyi mda'* 'the collected (or community) arrows of Rdo sbis', emphasizing the unity of the deities and the unity of the communities

Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye are believed to be immigrants and not sincerely dedicated to the local area for they often recall their native homes. Moreover, these mountain deities were at odds and frequently fought. Their devotees, the local people, were thus often in conflict. As a result, establishing unity and harmony between the local mountain deities appeared paramount and, in the early twentieth century, certain enthusiastic local worthies discussed the possibility of establishing a collective *lab tse* for the three mountain deities. Shes rab rgya mtsho (1884-1968), a Buddhist scholar born in the region, composed two parallel articles dedicated to the three local mountain deities—*The bsang Offering Ritual to Rdo sbis's Three Powerful Deities Stong Dar Gung* (1982:48) and *The Celestial Drink Offering Ritual to Rdo sbis's Three Powerful Deities Stong Dar Gung* (1982:52). The author writes (1982:51, 55) at the

end of both articles: "If a collective *lab tse* is established for the three deities, it will bring great harmony to all residents in Rdo sbis, both monks and laymen."

This suggestion was unrealized until 1989, when the reincarnate lama, Gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i dbang phyug (1926-2000), one of two abbots of Bla brang Monastery, was invited to supervise the project. Gung thang Rinpoche chose the site and the date for the *lab tse* ritual—the fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar. The first ritual, dedicated to Stong ri, Dar rgyal, and Gung ye, was performed that year with Gung thang Rinpoche presiding. Beginning in the second year, the date was changed to the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month because people are busy harvesting in the eighth lunar month.

### The Ritual

Almost every household prepares an arrow or tree branches in advance. Every village also prepares a *spyi mda'* 'community arrow'. People gather at the *lab tse* on the morning of the appointed day. Women and children come empty-handed and participate only as spectators. Men carry *mda'*. Nearly everyone wears Tibetan clothing and participates as a member of their village. The number of participants and the number and quality of *mda'* collectively symbolize a village. Villages compete to be the best in both categories. Contributing *mda'* and participation in this ritual are seen as obligatory.

The ritual is organized by a group of approximately eight local people that includes one or two revered monks, respected older men with organizational experience, and one or two representatives from the local township government. Several monks chant and prepare *gtor ma* 'sacrificial cakes' for the mountain deities.

Arrows are inserted into the *lab tse* altar and a huge *bsang* offering is burned before the *lab tse*. Meanwhile, thousands of *rlung rta*, a symbol of good fortune, are tossed

into the air while men shout "*Lha rgyal lo* Victory to the Deities!" to summon the mountain deities to give glory, honor, fame, prosperity, power, and progeny to those assembled.

This ritual is completed in a morning and is followed by the activities mentioned. This collection of activities lasts two or three days.

## CONCLUSION

Locals believe that establishment of this collective *lab tse* improved the relationship between local people and between the three mountain deities, and that the three mountain deities are now more dedicated to the local area. This is illustrated by the belief that Rdo sbis is developing in positive ways, for example, children are obtaining more education through the state school system, more local people are able to obtain paid employment outside the area, and so on.

Rdo sbis mountain deities are asked to protect humans, livestock, and crops and to resolve conflicts between villages. When a dispute arises between two villages sharing a single mountain deity, the latter is believed to assist the village that offers the most sacrifices.

*Lab tse* are also recognized landmarks. During grassland conflicts, *lab tse* are accepted as territorial markers, which explains the importance a village attaches to a *lab tse* as a boundary marker in the annual *lab tse* ritual for the mountain deity.

Mountain deities are a vibrant part of every local Tibetan's consciousness. They are protective deities that, if properly served, can aid an individual in times of great physical need in this life. These deities were also historically accessible through local spirit mediums and thus embody aspects of Tibetanness in terms of how they are visualized and depicted that transcend time and space. The *lab tse* ritual thus provides an opportunity for each participant, with the

entire local community, to rejoice in beseeching and appeasing the mountain deities—a powerful reaffirmation of Tibetan identity.

By participating in the ritual as a part of the larger community, people renew a sense of responsibility for the community. Karmay (1998:429) writes that:

Participation in such a ritual therefore implies total integration into the community: this in turn implies inherited social and political obligation, moral and individual responsibility, and an affirmation of communal and national solidarity in the face of external aggression. By the same token, internal conflict and disunity engender the withdrawal of the deity's favor which affect the power and prosperity of the community.

There is a sense that when the status of an individual in the local community improves, the entire community also benefits, and that an individual may not become prosperous and powerful without increasing the fortune of the entire community.



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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Dan ma འདན་མ

'Dod rtse འདོད་རྩེ

'Gyur med འགྱུར་མེད

'O po che འོ་པོ་ཆེ

'Obs dmar འོབས་དམར

'Obs dmar mdo འོབས་དམར་མདོ

'Ong rgyal འོང་རྒྱལ

A

A lags bzang po ཨ་ལགས་བཟང་པོ

A mdo ཨ་མདོ

A myes ཨ་མྱེས

A myes rma chen ཨ་མྱེས་རྩ་ཆེན

B

*bdag mo* བདག་མོ

Bis ri བིས་རི

Bka' ma mkha' 'bum བཀའ་མ་མཁའ་འབུམ

Bkra rdzas བཀྲ་རྩ་ས

Bla brang ལྷ་བྲང

Bla ma'i lung ba ལྷ་མའི་ལུང་བ

Blo bzang bstan pa rgya mtsho ལྷོ་བཟང་བསྟན་པ་རྒྱ་མཚོ

Bon བོན

Bong rgya བོང་རྒྱ

Bsam tshang བསམ་མཚང

*bsang* བསང

*btsan* བཅན

C

Chafu 查甫

Chang Yutian 昌玉田

*chos skyong* ཆོས་སྒྱུང་

D

Da rgyal mang po rje དར་རྒྱལ་མང་པོ་རྗེ

Daowei 道伟

Dar rgyal དར་རྒྱལ་

Dar rgyal dge bsnyen chen mo དར་རྒྱལ་དགེ་བསྐྱེན་ཆེན་མོ་

Dar rgyal dgung blon spun gsum དར་རྒྱལ་དགུང་བློན་སྤུན་གསུམ་

Dar rgyal spun gsum དར་རྒྱལ་སྤུན་གསུམ་

Dbus gtsang དབུས་གཙང་

Dge 'dun chos 'phel དགེ་འདུན་ཆོས་འཕེལ་

Dge bsnyen phying dkar ba དགེ་བསྐྱེན་ཕྱིང་དཀར་བ་

*dge bsnyen* དགེ་བསྐྱེན་

Dgra 'dul nor bu དག་འདུལ་ནོར་བུ་

Dgu rus དགུ་རུས་

Dkyil shar དཀྱིལ་ཤར་

Dmag dpon དམག་དཔོན་

Dpal ldan bkra shis དཔལ་ལྷན་བཀྲ་ཤིས་

Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las ཏུང་དཀར་བློ་བཟང་འཕྲིན་ལས་

Dung ri ཏུང་རི་

Dung ri dkar po ཏུང་རི་དཀར་པོ་

*dus 'khor* ཏུས་འཁོར་

G

Gansu 甘肃

Gdong sna གདོང་སྤྲ་

Gesang Nuobu 格桑诺布

Grags pa གྲགས་པ་

Gser khang pa blo bzang bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho གསེར་ཁང་པ་

སྒོ་བཟང་བཟླ་འཛིན་ཀྱ་མཚོ་

Gshong ba གཤོང་བ་

Gter gyi bdag po གཏེར་གྱི་བདག་པོ་

Gter kha lung གཏེར་ཁ་ལུང་

gter khug གཏེར་ཁུག་

gtor ma གཏོར་མ་

Gung thang dkon mchog bstan pa'i dbang phyug གུང་ཐང་

དགོན་མཚོག་བཟླ་པའི་དབང་ཕུག་

Gung ye གུང་ཡེ་

Guoluo 果洛

gye tu གྱེ་ཏུ་

gzhi bdag གཞི་བདག་

H

Hor grol ba ཧོར་གྲོལ་བ་

Hor ron po ཧོར་རོན་པོ་

K

Kangxi 康熙

Khis dmar ཁིས་དམར་

Khri btsun ཁྲི་བཙུན་

L

la btsas ལ་བཙས་

la gzhas ལ་གཞས་

la rtse ལ་རེ་

lab tse ལ་བ་ཙེ་

Lcang shar ལུང་ཤར་

lha ba ལྷ་བ་

lha rgyal lo ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ལོ་

Long Keduo 隆可多



M

*mda'* མདའ

Mdan ma མདན་མ

Mdan ma mchod rten kha མདན་མ་མཚོད་རྟེན་ཁ

Mdo ba མདོ་བ

Mengda tianchi 孟达天池

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག

Ming Dynasty 明朝

Mtsho nag stong ru མཚོ་ནག་སྟོང་རུ

Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྟོན

N

Ngo ma རོ་མ

Nian Gengyao 年羹尧

*nor bu* རོར་བུ

*nor bu me 'bar* རོར་བུ་མེ་འབར

Nya mo ཉ་མོ

Nyin pa ཉིན་པ

P

Pho brang dmar po ཕོ་བྲང་དམར་པོ

Putaoshan 普陀山

Q

Qinghai 青海

Qitaibao 起台堡

R

Ra skor ར་སྐོར

Rdo sbis རྩོ་སྤེས

Rdo sbis grwa tshang རྩོ་སྤེས་གྲ་ཚང

Reb gong རེབ་གོང

Rgya bza' mon sde yum chen grags mo རྒྱ་བཟའ་མོན་སྡེ་ཡུམ་ཆེན་

གྲགས་མོ

Rgya mkhar རྒྱ་མཁར་

Rgyal tshang རྒྱལ་ཚང་

Rin chen tshe ring རིན་ཅེན་ཚེ་རིང་

rlung rta རླུང་རྟ་

Rnye blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan རྟེ་བོ་བཟང་བསྟན་པ་འི་

རྒྱལ་མཚན་

rtsam pa རྩ་མ་པ་

Rtsi rkyang རྩི་རྒྱང་

## S

Sala (Salar) 撒拉

Sde sman སྡེ་སྨན་

Ser grong སེར་གྲོང་

Shaanxi 陕西

Shes rab rgya mtsho ཤེས་རབ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་

Shong zhan ཤོང་ཇན་

Skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་ནོར་བུ་

skyes lha སྟེས་ལྷ་

Sprel lung སྤྲེལ་ལུང་

spyi mda' སྤྱི་མདའ་

Srong btsan sgam po སྟོང་བཅན་སྐམ་པོ་

Stong ru སྟོང་རུ་

Stod ra སྟོད་ར་

Stong ri སྟོང་རི་

Stong ri g.yu mstho སྟོང་རི་གཡུ་མཚོ་

T

*thang ka* ཐང་ཀ

Thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma ཐུ་འུ་བཀྲ་ན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་ཉི་མ

Tongren 同仁

Tsha phug ཨ་ཕུག

Tshe go ཨོ་གོ

Tshe tan zhabs drung ཨོ་ཏན་ཞབས་རྩུང

X

Xiahe 夏河

Xiongxian 雄先

Xunhua 循化

Y

Yongzheng 雍正

*yul lha* ཡུལ་ལྷ

Z

Zam tshang ཟམ་ཨང

Zhang zhung རང་ཁུང

Zhejiang 浙江

Zhou Dynasty 周朝

CHILDBIRTH AND CHILDCARE IN  
RDO SBIS TIBETAN TOWNSHIP

Klu mo tshe ring (Reed College) and Gerald Roche (Qinghai Normal University)

ABSTRACT

Rdo sbis (Daowei 道 帛) Tibetan Autonomous Township, Xunhua 循 化 Salar Autonomous County, Haidong 海 东 Region, is located in eastern Qinghai 青 海 Province, PR China. Knowledge, beliefs, and behavior associated with childbirth, midwifery, and childcare in Rdo sbis Township Tibetan communities are described, focusing on a single village as a case-study.

KEY WORDS

Rdo sbis, *ma ma*, childbirth, childcare, Xunhua

## SETTING

Rdo sbis Tibetan Autonomous Township, located in southwest Xunhua Salar<sup>1</sup> Autonomous County, Haidong 海东 Region, Qinghai 青海 Province, is one of five Tibetan townships in Xunhua County. The others are Bis mdo (Wendu 文都), Rkang tsha (Gangcha 岗察), KA ring (Galeng 尕楞), and Se chang (Xichang 夕昌). There are twenty-seven villages in Rdo sbis Township, including two Salar, one Hui 回, and one Han 汉 village. Nearly all Rdo sbis residents are Tibetans.

Rdo sbis is in a valley surrounded by mountains, the tallest three being A myes Dar rgyal, A myes Gong ye,<sup>2</sup> and A myes Stong ri, which are venerated as the abodes of mountain deities by local Tibetans. A myes Dar rgyal is located on the border between Qinghai and Gansu 甘肃 Province's Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture 临夏回族自治州. A myes Gong ye (on the west side of the valley) and A myes Stong ri (in the east) face each other. A road runs through the valley center between these mountains. Villages lie on either side of the road. Certain villages located on the mountainsides have fields watered only by rain. Such villages are called *ri ma*. Villages at the foot of the mountains and on the valley floor, called *chu ma*, have

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<sup>1</sup> Sala 撒拉. Ma and Stuart (1996:287) state that:

The Salar are a Turkic-speaking Islamic people who live primarily in Xunhua County in eastern Qinghai. Their origins are uncertain, but the Salar themselves maintain that during the thirteenth century their ancestors left Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan and eventually settled in their present location.

<sup>2</sup> Alternative spelling: Gong yul.

fields irrigated by the river.<sup>3</sup> Behind A myes Stong ri is Lake Stong ri lha mtsho (Mengda tianchi 孟达天池). Rdo sbis Tibetans visit the lake to worship, particularly on the fourth day of the fourth lunar month.<sup>4</sup> In the western section of the valley a stupa marks the boundary between Salar and Tibetan territories, known as Naturally Arisen Stupa (Mchod rten rang byung). Locals believe that the stupa rose by itself overnight, and contend that if one wants to go to Lhasa to worship, one first should visit Mchod rten rang byung.

The focal site of this study, Dpa' sde<sup>5</sup> Village, is one of three small villages collectively known as Dgu ru.<sup>6</sup> There were approximately 170 people in Dpa' sde Village in 2008 that included sixty-five adult women, sixty-one adult men, and forty-four children (under the age of fifteen). The average Dpa' sde Village family had five members.

Dpa' sde villagers grow barley, wheat, and potatoes on land that is irrigated five or six times annually between the fourth and sixth lunar months. Wealthy families with at least eight *mu* 亩<sup>7</sup> of land sell surplus barley and earn about 800 RMB per year; one *mu* of farmland produces 700-800 *jin* 斤<sup>8</sup> (350-400 kilograms) of barley. However, most village families lack this amount of land. More commonly, two or three households share about eight *mu* of land on which they cultivate barley for subsistence.

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<sup>3</sup> The river running through the center of the valley is locally known as the Rdo sbis gzhung chu.

<sup>4</sup> Certain nearby Minhe 民和 Mangghuer (Tu 土) also venerate this lake as evident in Bao Yizhi's 鲍义志 (1990) short story, *Goddess Pool*.

<sup>5</sup> Dpa' sde (brave/ heroic village) is pronounced 'Hwadee'. Minzhu 民主 'Democracy', is the village's Chinese name.

<sup>6</sup> The three villages are Dpa' sde, Dgu ri, and Ri gong ma.

<sup>7</sup> One *mu* = 0.16 acre/ 0.067 hectares.

<sup>8</sup> One *jin* = a half kilogram.

Villagers earn cash income from livestock; each family usually owns at least one cow. From the cow's milk, villagers produce butter and cheese that is not eaten but sold to generate income. A family can earn 600-800 RMB per year selling butter and cheese. Most households make twenty-five to thirty *jìn* of butter and thirty *jìn* of cheese annually. Villagers also work as migrant laborers. Almost every able adult leaves the village in May and June to dig caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*), a medicinal herb found at high altitudes. Each caterpillar fungus sold for ten to fifteen RMB in 2007. Each person earned 2,000-3,000 RMB during good seasons.<sup>9</sup>

Money earned is spent on children's school expenses, the New Year festivities, fertilizer, electricity, and other essentials. In total, the average family earns approximately 3,700 RMB in cash per year; they must spend approximately 3,500 RMB per year, leaving 200 RMB in annual surplus. The family borrows money to pay tuition if their children attend university.<sup>10</sup>

Village houses are situated near each other, separated by lanes about three meters wide. House compounds occupy approximately 200 square meters. Houses are single storied and occupy about one third of the compound: the remaining area is a courtyard. In the past, most houses were made of rammed earth with very little timber. In 2008, however, using much timber was commonplace. Unlike local Han, villagers lack separate

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<sup>9</sup> This background information on Dpa' sde Village was collected for a small-scale development project in the village that was planned and implemented by the first author. For more information see <http://www.shemgroup.org/reports/490/running-water-project-for-minzhu-village/>.

<sup>10</sup> The total annual expense of a university education in 2008 ranged from 8,000-12,000 RMB per student.

rooms for a kitchen, living room, and bedroom. A single room is used for all these purposes, with a stove and a large brick platform, the *he tse*.<sup>11</sup> When villagers cook, smoke and heat from the stove goes through a flue beneath the brick platform bed, heating the platform before exiting from a hole at the base of a wall of the room. Houses also have small rooms with only a large *he tse* heated by a stove used to heat the beds. These rooms are used for guests and when women are confined after giving birth.

The west side of Dpa' sde Village has a *ma Ni* hall (prayer hall) where villagers gather to chant and hold certain rituals. It is the only place in the village where religious images are kept, other than in household shrines. There are several monasteries in Rdo sbis Township. Rdo sbis grwa tshang (also called Dar rje gling) is the largest, and located just north of Dpa' sde Village. About 300 monks reside in the monastery where locally important Buddhist festivals are held.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, household rituals are performed by monks from this monastery.

There is no medical clinic in Dpa' sde Village, however, the village is located a fifteen minute walk from the township center, making it convenient to visit doctors and purchase medicine at the hospital and several clinics located there. The hospital is staffed by local Tibetans who practice Traditional Chinese Medicine. When a patient is seriously ill, the hospital advises the patient to go to the county hospital, because local doctors feel ill-equipped and inexperienced. The health clinics are also staffed by local Tibetans, who practice Traditional Tibetan Medicine,

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<sup>11</sup> To our knowledge, this oral term has no literary form.

<sup>12</sup> The important festivals are the birth and death days of the Buddha (both in the fourth lunar month) and the fifteenth day of Lo sar (the New Year period). All Tibetans in the township participate.



making diagnoses by examining pulses and providing treatment with traditional herbal medicines.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Compared to ethnic groups of similar size in China, literature on Tibetan pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing is relatively rich.<sup>13</sup> However, this literature is flawed by the tendency to make generalized, normative statements about all Tibetan society by drawing data from only a single, or small number of, research sites. This results in such statements as, "Tibet is one of the few societies in the world which does not have traditional birth attendants or midwives" (Adams et al. 2005:821) or "...Tibetans generally prefer the first child to be a girl" (Norbu Chophel 1983:5); both of which are counter-to-fact in the present case (see also Craig 2009a). We concur with Samuel's (1993) use of the plural in describing 'Tibetan societies', and therefore limit our findings to a single Tibetan township, focusing on one village.

Biomedical investigations of childbirth and childhood in Tibetan communities were conducted by Dang et al. (2004), Tripathy and Gupta (2005), Niermeyer et al. (1995), Zamudio et al. (1993), Deng (1991), Harris et al. (2001), and Yang et al. (1999). These studies generally focus on the effects of high altitude on infant size and mortality, or on infant and child nutrition.

Two sources may be noted in the popular literature—

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<sup>13</sup> There were 5,416,198 Tibetans in China in November 2000 (Mackerras 2003). A search of English journal literature for articles concerning pregnancy, child birth, and child rearing among groups with comparable populations, e.g., the Mongols (5,813,947), Tujia 土家 (8,028,133), and Buyei 布依 (2,971,460), provided no results.

Farwell and Maiden (1992) and Maiden and Farwell (1991). These works generalize about Tibetan culture and homogenize all Tibetan people; there is a lack of site-specific research; vagueness in language use is present; there is a tendency to see textual, philosophical Buddhism as the sole source of Tibetan culture; and a resultant debatable view of Tibetan culture and people as enlightened, self-conscious, purposeful, and desirous and capable of achieving harmony in every aspect of life.

Anthropological literature is more extensive. Adams et al. (2005a) conducted research on traditional views of having a safe delivery among women in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the aim of which was to "... develop a culturally appropriate village birth attendant training program" (821). The authors found that efforts to ensure child and mother safety focused on

... fear of attacks by spirits/ demons and negative health effects of meeting strangers; fear of and taboos against pollution/ defilement (*grib*); injunctions to silence and secrecy; various beliefs about diet and behavior; and various social and economic obstacles to receiving hospital care (826).

Adams et al. (2005b) discuss the research methodology used, and the cultural specificities of adapting it to the 'Tibetan' context.

Rozario and Samuel (2002) describe Tibetan birthing practices in the comparative context of 'South Asia', focusing their discussion primarily on pollution (*grib*) concepts and related practices. Given this and Adams' (2005) focus on *grib*, discussions in Samuel (1993), de Nebesky-Wojkowitz (2002), and Mills (2005) are also relevant to the current study, though this concept is not of central importance in Rdo sbis. Levine's (1987a, 1987b) work focuses on demographic

aspects of childbirth and rearing, including aspects of child preference, in polyandrous Tibetan communities in Nepal. Asboe (1932) provides a brief account of childbirth in Manchat (*sic*, Western Tibet),

Several (male) Tibetan authors have written in English on Tibetan pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing. In *Folk Customs and Superstitions of Tibet*, Norbu Chopel (1983) provides a long list of 'Superstitions on Children', without sourcing the provenance of such information. Thubten Sangay (1975), citing unnamed scriptural sources, gives mostly prescriptive accounts of Tibetan beliefs and practices regarding signs occurring at conception; signs during pregnancy; duration of pregnancy; the health of the expectant mother; signs indicating birth is near; preparation of baby clothing; final signs of birth; cutting the umbilical cord, etc.; recuperation of the placenta; ceremonies performed after birth; special rituals; naming the child; birth festivities; the baby's first outing; nursing; the health of a child; feeding; growing up; birthday celebrations; illness; general symptoms of illness; diagnosis; treatment of mouth pustules; teething; diarrhea and vomiting; measles; treatment of dropped liver; preparation of preventative medicine; playing; and education. As well as not citing the sources of this information, the provenance is also not provided.

Of greatest relevance to the current work is the online working paper on "Socioeconomic Status and Maternal and Child Health in Rural Tibetan Villages" (Kunchok Gyaltsen et al. 2007). Drawing data from two unnamed Tibetan agricultural communities in Qinghai Province, the following useful information is provided: only thirty percent of women visited a health care provider during pregnancy; ninety-three percent of respondents gave birth at home; birth-attendants were frequently mothers; ninety-five percent of women buried the placenta after birth; on average, respondents claimed to have had twenty-two days of successive post-

partum rest; and eighty-six percent of women claimed not to have suffered infection after birth. This data largely concords with what was found in Rdo sbis Township.

In the context of the above, the significance of the current work is that it is the first site-specific study by a Tibetan female of Tibetan concepts and practices surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing, and that employs local accounts and oral texts as evidence of local realities in contrast to making normative statements about Tibetan society in general.

## METHODS

A data collection protocol designed to gather information from female village consultants consisted of fifteen questions regarding pregnancy, birth, and post-natal care. It was administered verbally to eight women from Gzhong ba and Dpa' sde villages in November (2007) and February (2008). In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with two key consultants: Tshe ring rdo rje (b. 1940) and Rta mgrin skyid (b. 1939). The first author also drew on her own experience as a native villager, who has witnessed many pregnancies and one birth.

## PREGNANCY

Local women believe they are pregnant when menstruation stops. Other indications include wanting to sleep longer than usual, excessive vomiting, lethargy, and changes in appetite. One woman who normally did not like sour food suddenly felt like eating such foods as *nas phye* 'sour barley bread' after becoming pregnant. Very rarely, if all of these signs are absent, and if the stomach does not protrude, a woman does

not know she is pregnant until giving birth, as described in the following account:

A girl called 'Dam ma was pregnant, but no one knew, including her. One day she felt very sick and her family took her to the township hospital. The doctors said that there was much water in her abdomen and they were unable to remove it. They asked her family to take her to the county hospital. The county doctors, aware of the township doctors' diagnosis, prepared to operate. Fortunately, 'Dam ma gave birth at that time, shocking everyone.

It is taboo for a woman to inform her family members that she is pregnant (see also Craig 2009b). Family members eventually notice, but do not ask about the pregnancy. During early pregnancy, women work as before and eat the same foods as usual. This continues until the family members learn that the woman is pregnant, and then the woman's workload changes. The family asks the woman to do light work but often, since no one else is available to do her chores, the woman continues working as usual.

Villagers predict the sex of the unborn by observing the shape of the woman's belly and interpreting the mother's dreams during pregnancy. If the mother's belly is round and protruding, with a vertical line from the center of the belly to the pubic hair, then the baby is thought to be a boy. On the other hand, if the belly is not rounded and does not protrude, then the baby is thought to be a girl.

Dreams also suggest the sex of the unborn child. If the mother often dreams about flowers, butterflies, and beautiful birds, the baby is thought to be a girl. However, if the mother dreams about snakes, lions, knives, and arrows, then it is thought that the baby is a boy. Apart from identifying the sex of the baby, villagers also believe that a

dream may show the unborn's personality or future fate. For example, if a parent dreams about rainbows before the birth, it is considered a sign that the baby will have a bright future.

Villagers prefer male children to female children, because females marry and generally leave the home to labor in another household. Men are considered physically stronger than women and capable of contributing more productive labor. If a couple is unable to deliver a male, a family member may visit a monastery to worship and pray for a son. After a son is born, the family holds a large celebration (see the following description), which is usually not held when a girl is born.

Villagers believe that the sex of a baby may change after birth, as demonstrated below:

A village girl's family told her that she was born a male. At the time when she was about to be born, all her family members expected her to be a boy and had asked a local lama to give them a yellow silk cloth to wrap the baby in. As expected, her mother successfully gave birth to a boy and everyone in the family was very happy and went to inform their relatives about their newborn baby. About two hours later, relatives happily came to the home to visit the baby. However, when they unwrapped the yellow silk cloth, they were shocked to see a girl. The baby's aunt cried for a long time at their baby boy having changed into a girl. Such a condition may be hereditary; one of that girl's cousins was also born a boy in the morning but by afternoon had changed into a girl. The baby's grandmother witnessed the process of her grandson becoming a girl. She was watching the baby and suddenly, the baby's penis separated into two parts. The grandmother tried to bind them together, crying, but eventually the baby became a girl.

Prenatal care for mother or infant is rarely practiced. In cases when the mother or other relatives have dreams indicating an auspicious future for the baby, the mother is asked not to wear clothes from non-relatives or widows, as these are considered unclean and might harm the baby. In addition, the mother is very careful that others not touch her head. These measures are thought to protect the unborn child.

### MIDWIVES<sup>14</sup>

Women return to their mother's house to give birth; if the woman has no mother or her mother is considered to live too far away, she stays in her husband's home. Very rarely, the mother may come to the daughter's husband's home to assist with the birth. *Ma ma*<sup>15</sup> 'birth attendants' are women who have given birth to five or six children. A woman does not become a *ma ma* because she has had many children. Others must request her help and she must agree to give it; however, cases where a woman has been asked and refused to assist are unknown. In Rdo sbis Township, each village has at least one or two *ma ma*, who are usually in their forties. However, if a woman has given birth to several children, she may become a midwife in her thirties. *Ma ma* receive no special training and require no instruments or texts. After an experienced woman has helped to give birth several times and has proven useful in safely delivering children and making the mother comfortable during childbirth, then she becomes a *ma ma*. Knowledge of the woman's skills spreads by word-of-mouth, and others request her assistance. Rta

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<sup>14</sup> The description given here is partly based on Roger and Solom's (1975) list of the characteristics of Asian midwives.

<sup>15</sup> This oral term has been Romanized according to an approximate phonetic transcription.

mgrin skyid describes her career as a *ma ma*:

I first gave birth when I was eighteen. My fourth child was born when I was twenty-eight. Afterwards, I began helping other women with childbirth. After giving birth to my eleventh child, I became a popular *ma ma*. Villagers still asked for my help when I was in my sixties. At the age of sixty-three, I stopped being a *ma ma*.

In all, I delivered seventeen babies and none of them died during delivery. However, one woman nearly needed to be taken to hospital because the baby tried to come out the anus. I had to ask her to lie prone and lean against the pillow. Then, I pushed against the woman's anus with my knee, to force the baby to exit correctly. After trying several times, the baby still didn't emerge, so I asked the woman to stand so we could take her to hospital. As soon as she did so, she gave birth!

Often, when a woman is giving birth, we ask her to crouch and lean back against something. This makes birth easier, but the best way is for the woman to stand. The baby and the afterbirth emerge easily this way. However, sometimes this is uncomfortable for the woman.

Retained placenta is a common problem. I have never had to deal with infections or hemorrhaging. We think losing blood after giving birth is helpful, because blood pollutes the woman's insides. To help the blood come out, we tie the woman's sash very tightly after birth and ask her to squat. No one worries about blood-loss following birth. However, in about 1975, a village woman lost blood for a month after birth, and a year later she was dead. In another case, a woman died immediately after giving birth, because the afterbirth didn't come out correctly. She bled to death.

Preventing infection is critical. Infection is caused by wind (*rlung*) going into the woman's body after she gives birth. We use a little flax or linseed oil to massage the



woman's legs and abdomen to prevent this. We sometimes use the same oil, heat it in a pan, pour it into a cloth bag, and place it between the woman's thighs. This is very helpful in preventing infection. It is also helpful for the woman to keep her legs tightly together; she needs to be careful when walking and when squatting to urinate. Some women will only move around on their hands and knees on the *he tse* after giving birth. Also, she should not lift her buttocks suddenly and needs to sit on a warm bed instead of sleeping, which is not good for her. All these things prevent infection.

It is taboo for a woman whose child has died during delivery or shortly after to become a *ma ma*, as such women are thought to have bad luck (*las ngan*) that can cause negative outcomes for the infant and mother. Similarly, widows are believed to bring bad luck to a woman and her baby and are not asked for help.

*Ma ma* are always women; there have never been male *ma ma* in Rdo sbis. Women would be uncomfortable with a male midwife; they are ashamed to let a man see them naked.<sup>16</sup> Women also think that men lack the necessary experience to be of assistance. A *ma ma* delivers fifteen to twenty babies in her life; in some years she delivers none, but in others years she may deliver up to seven babies.

The knowledge a *ma ma* possesses is never learnt from books but acquired through experience and talking with

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<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Peissel (1979:229) states that in Mustang, at the opposite end of the Tibetan cultural realm: "When [a woman] is about to have her child, she is confined to her house, alone with her husband, whose duty it is to help her in child bearing." Azziz (1978) reports that the husband also assists in birth in the southern Tibetan region of D'ing-ri.

other women. *Ma ma* are never paid for their work.<sup>17</sup> Because of the lack of payment and training, villagers do not perceive being a midwife as a profession. *Ma ma* simply provide assistance when asked.

The role of *ma ma* is viewed neutrally and it does not affect a woman's status. Apart from their role as midwife, *ma ma* perform no other para-medical services. For example, midwives are usually not involved before delivery, and often it is the mother or mother-in-law who instructs the pregnant woman what to do and not to do. A midwife's main role is to assist in childbirth, mostly in dealing with the mother and infant immediately after the birth.

## BIRTH

For the reasons stated above, women normally continue to work as before until giving birth. Moreover, women are taught that work softens the bones and makes birth easier, as indicated by Brtan lo's (b. 1934) account of childbirth:

In 1957, I had birth pangs on the way back from collecting wood. I gave birth to one of my sons just as I got home. A friend gave birth while collecting fuel, and another while she was out in the field, weeding barley. In the past, giving birth outside was very common, and women gave birth without pain.

Prior to the late 1960s, it was not uncommon for the mother or child to die in birth. Another account from Brtan lo explains:

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<sup>17</sup> However, when the family gives 'birth gifts' to village children (described below), they give fried bread with brown sugar to the *ma ma* to show appreciation.

When I was ten, I was circumambulating the village stupa, when a very pregnant woman began experiencing birth pangs. Everybody thought she would soon give birth, and so helped her to a mountain near the stupa, where she immediately gave birth. However, the baby was stillborn.

Nobody blames the mother or the *ma ma* if a child dies at birth. The death is considered to be the result of the infant's bad karma from a previous life.

In the past, most women typically gave birth to six to eight children, one of which generally died during childbirth or soon after.

### IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH

Immediately after birth, the intervention of the *ma ma* is essential for ensuring maternal and infant health. The *lte thag* 'umbilical cord' is cut first. Problems may ensue if it is not detached correctly. People in Rdo sbis leave a distance of four fingers between the abdomen and the point where the umbilical cord is detached by tying a string around it. No certain string is used; the only requirement is that it be strong. The cord detaches after seven days. A slice of deer antler is placed into the inverted navel to prevent the infant's abdomen from becoming infected.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Frick (1957:186) described the use of deer antler in traditional medicine in the Xining valley: "... deer horn ... is included in almost every medicinal formula. The people regard it as a cure-all." Although the people Frick worked with and studied were likely Han Chinese, considerable overlap in medical systems in this area would not be surprising.

Before detaching the cord, it is essential to tie the navel very tightly; otherwise, the baby's navel becomes loose and gradually protrudes. Only one such case is currently known within Dpa' sde. Apart from being considered abnormal, a protruding navel is also said to cause urinary urgency. The umbilical cord is usually cut with scissors or a knife that may or may not have been washed with water.

Those unable to have a child occasionally come to the home of a newborn and ask for the umbilical cord and a piece of cloth from the mother's robe, in the belief that these assist in becoming pregnant. The umbilical cord, wrapped in the cloth, is tied on a string around the neck of the woman who wishes to give birth

The midwife carefully washes the newborn. If it is not washed well, then its skin will not be smooth and white when it matures. The *ma ma* first washes the baby with warm water. Two or three days later, the family washes the baby with milk containing conifer needles.

Washing the infant's first clothes is also significant. The baby remains naked for seven days after birth. Its first clothes are a simple, sleeveless garment made by a family member. The family does not wash these clothes until they become very soiled. People think that the dirtier the clothes the better; the soiled cloth is thought to keep the baby healthy by increasing its ability to defend against disease and pollution (*grib*). The water first used to wash the clothes is considered special and is discarded where people cannot easily step on it, which is thought to harm the infant. The garment is worn again after washing, but can only be used for one to three months, after which the material disintegrates. The remaining rag is then thrown into a fire.

Immediately after birth, a family member, usually the baby's grandfather, puts the *rtse* *rogs* (afterbirth, literally 'play friend') in a cloth bag and buries it under the compound's threshold. It is thought that if the *rtse* *rogs*

becomes dusty while in the hole, the baby's nose will be blocked and the baby will not be able to breathe well. It is also thought that the baby will vomit excessively if the hole is not deep enough.

Before this is done, a man from the family goes to the *ma Ni* hall and blows a conch if a son has been born. The conch is not blown if the newborn is female.

A family member places a small piece of butter on the newborn's tongue before the baby's first taste of milk in the hope that the baby will always have good food and never be hungry.

## NAMING THE BABY

Babies are named seven days after birth. The family asks for a name from a lama or respected monk from the local monastery or, if they have a relative in such important monasteries as Sku 'bum, they ask him.<sup>19</sup> If this is not done, the grandfather<sup>20</sup> names the child. The baby becomes sick if an inappropriate name is bestowed. No one, including the mother, knows the baby's name until the seventh day. The grandfather or the father (if he asked a lama for the name) keeps this a secret after learning the name.

While the family waits for the name, they ask the lama to give the baby a piece of colored cloth about thirty centimeters long. The lama who gives the baby its name decides the color of the cloth, which is hung around the

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<sup>19</sup> Sku 'bum Monastery, to the south of Xining 西宁, Qinghai Province's capital, is the birthplace of the Dge lugs pa sect's founder, Tsong kha pa (1357-1419).

<sup>20</sup> Usually the paternal grandfather, but if a woman's husband lives with her in her family's home, the maternal grandfather chooses the name.

infant's neck. A small cut is made up from the bottom of the cloth everyday for the next seven days. On the seventh day, the cloth must be completely cut. On that day after breakfast, the one who has the name (usually the grandfather or the father), goes to the baby, puts his mouth close to the baby's ear (right ear for boys and left ear for girls), and says in a loud whisper, "Dear baby, X<sup>21</sup> is your name and you will have this name with you. From today you need to take care of this name; don't lose it." From then on, all family members use the name.

Monks consult zodiac almanacs for names, while laymen do not. The name might be considered unfit if the baby is unhealthy or cries a great deal, in which case the family may ask the lama who gave the name to do a divination using prayer beads to determine if the name is the problem, in which case he gives the baby another name. The lama chants scriptures to cure the baby if a name change is deemed unnecessary.

## POST-NATAL CARE AND DISEASE PREVENTION

The family makes a fire outside the courtyard gate after the processes described above are completed. The new mother and infant should not see visitors for a month, because guests may be contaminated by '*dre* 'ghosts' or *gdon* 'evil spirits' that can make the infant sick. The fire prevents '*dre* and *gdon* from entering the family compound. If the baby is a boy then the fire is to the right of the door and if it is a female then the fire is on the left. If there is no fire burning and no-one comes from inside the compound to light one, then straw is left there and guests make a fire themselves. Guests may also spit behind them to ward off evil.

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<sup>21</sup> Where X indicates the baby's name.

The mother, called *bang ma* during this time, may also be given a separate room. Because family members need to go out often to fetch water, to the toilet, and tend livestock, it is impossible for them to remain at home and uncontaminated. Confining the *bang ma* and infant to a separate room prevents contamination (*grib*). Family members first rest in another room for a short time in order to decontaminate themselves before visiting the mother and infant.

Dietary precautions taken by the *bang ma* include not eating garlic, onion, chili, salt, and pork because it is thought such foods may sicken both mother and child. Fried bread, with no seasoning or oil mixed into the dough, is considered good food, as is barley flour fried in rapeseed oil. Porridge made from this also helps if the mother is not lactating. *Ja nag* 'black tea' is usually reserved for elders and is also considered good for the *bang ma*.

The baby breastfeeds for seven days after the delivery and then eats specially made fried wheat flour mixed with cow or yak milk. Though the baby can eat solid food after about a year, breastfeeding continues until the baby is six or seven years old; some children breastfeed to the age of ten. Women consider weaning children cruel and delay it as long as possible; however, if successive births occur, the child will be weaned as soon as possible.

Meat is considered the best food for the mother. However, pork and goat meat are considered unclean; mutton is usually eaten. No seasonings, including salt, are used in preparing the meat, and the woman should not eat noodles for seven days. Food given by non-family members is also considered bad for the woman. After a woman gives birth, her friends and relatives visit her with special food called *bang zas*, which is fried bread made from dough with much rapeseed oil mixed into it. Family members eat this food.

Restorative tonics containing deer antler, honey, and

brown sugar are also prepared. Women take a spoonful of honey and a slice of deer antler every morning before they eat, and drink tea with brown sugar.<sup>22</sup> Deer antler is very expensive<sup>23</sup> and only wealthy families buy it. Honey and brown sugar are cheap and commonly used.

The *bang ma* and infant should stay warm. The mother wears warm clothes, including a fur hat and a sheepskin robe. She must not drink cold water. Furthermore, the *he tse* where the baby and the mother sleep must be kept very warm. Straw is burned inside the *he tse* to warm it and there are cases of infants being burned because of this.

## TREATING INFANT AND CHILDHOOD ILLNESSES

Common problems in childhood are crying, excessive vomiting, and fear.

If the baby seems constantly afraid, a cure is attempted using *lcags mda' lcag bzhus* 'melt metal to make a metal arrow'. A small amount of oil is boiled in a new pot, and a small amount of lead that might come from caps of bottles given out by hospitals and pharmacies, is added. Earlier, an earthen clod, flattened on one side, is prepared. An impression half a centimeter deep is made in the shape of a miniature bow and arrow on the flattened side of the clod. After about three minutes, the metal has melted and *skrag phud* 'expel fear' is performed by circling the pot containing the oil and metal above the baby's head. Then, the metal is poured into a bowl of water to determine how much fear is in the baby. The baby is deemed to still be very afraid if the

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<sup>22</sup> Deer antler is ingested as a powder, which is wrapped in paper and swallowed; this is done because it is said to be harmful if deer antler touches the teeth.

<sup>23</sup> In 2008 deer antler cost 16,000-24,000 RMB per kilogram.



molten metal spreads out widely, in which case the metal is retrieved from the water, melted again, and passed around the baby's head as before. While doing this, the grandfather says "*Lo lo ma skrag, ma skrag* Baby don't be afraid, don't be afraid." After doing this three or four times, the molten metal no longer spreads out in the cold water.

The metal is then melted a final time and poured into the arrow-shaped cast on the clod. The molten metal sets quickly and then the miniature bow and arrow is attached to the back of the baby's clothes with a string. It is believed that the baby's fear has now been expelled.

Another method, called *tha bkrus* 'ash washing', is used when a baby cries persistently. *Tha bkrus* must be done at night, using *rtsam pa*, a portion of the baby's leftover food plus ash from three different stoves; a typical house usually has three stoves in three different rooms of the house used primarily for heating. These items are mixed in a shallow wicker basket by the mother or the grandmother, and brushed over the baby's clothes and body by hand. While doing this, the person might say:

<sup>1</sup> Song, song

<sup>2</sup> Nga'i khyim nas ma 'dug

<sup>3</sup> Nga'i khyim na go kha gsum gyi tha ma gtogs ga cig  
kyang med

<sup>4</sup> A khu rgyal bo tshang la song

<sup>5</sup> A khu rgyal bo tshang na gos dngul dar gsum yod

<sup>6</sup> Skra ril gos gsum yod

<sup>7</sup> A khu rgyal bo tshang la song na

<sup>8</sup> De yan gyi skyid dang de yan gyi bde zhig med

<sup>9</sup> Nga'i tshang gi byis pa'i brla rtsi to 'dra

<sup>10</sup> Mgo sgong ba 'dra

<sup>11</sup> Da song

<sup>12</sup> Nga'i khyim nas ma 'dug

<sup>13</sup> A khu rgyal bo tshang la song

- <sup>1</sup> Go! Go!
- <sup>2</sup> Don't stay in my home,
- <sup>3</sup> There is nothing in my house but the ash from three pots.
- <sup>4</sup> Go to Uncle King's home.
- <sup>5</sup> In Uncle King's home are cloth, silver, and silk – all three.
- <sup>6</sup> Hair and its ornaments, silk – all three.
- <sup>7</sup> Go to Uncle King's house.
- <sup>8</sup> It could not be happier or more comfortable there.
- <sup>9</sup> My family's child's thigh is like a *rtsi to*,<sup>24</sup>
- <sup>10</sup> [And has a] head like an egg.
- <sup>11</sup> Go now!
- <sup>12</sup> Don't stay in my home,
- <sup>13</sup> Go to Uncle King's home.

The mixture is discarded outside, preferably at a crossroads. The evil force causing the baby to cry has now been exorcised.

At the age of around five, a child may lose its soul by being frightened by a sudden loud sound such as thunder. The child does not talk much and seems distracted and distant in such an event. The soul is thought to be wandering, lost, and aimless. In this case, a ritual called *bla 'bod* 'soul calling' is performed. A female family member makes fried bread in a metal pan, and wraps it in the child's clothes. She then goes to the place where the child was frightened<sup>25</sup> and loudly calls:

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<sup>24</sup> A tall, thin, weak-stemmed plant used to make brooms. It is easily blown over by wind.

<sup>25</sup> Villagers often go to an external corner of the compound wall, because they believe a child can lose its soul there. Children are warned to avoid such places.

- <sup>1</sup> Lo lo
- <sup>2</sup> Ma skrag
- <sup>3</sup> Ma ngu
- <sup>4</sup> Yul la shog
- <sup>5</sup> Yul na a ma a pha tshang ma yod

- <sup>1</sup> Baby,
- <sup>2</sup> Fear not!
- <sup>3</sup> Don't cry!
- <sup>4</sup> Come home!
- <sup>5</sup> Your mother and father are both at home!

The bread is then fed to livestock. Seven or eight days are needed for the baby to regain its wandering soul if it is badly frightened. The soul returns the next day if the child is not badly frightened.

Soot from a pot bottom is put on a baby's forehead between the eyebrows, or fed to the baby to treat stomach aches.

Another common ailment during childhood is vomiting after meals caused, it is thought, by a displaced organ, usually the liver. This condition, known as *mchin pa lhung ba* 'descended liver', is caused by sudden movement of the baby's head, because the infant cannot control its neck. A small piece of bread covered in cotton is attached to the back of the child's clothes to cure this.

A newborn also has a small bell on the back of its clothes to make it happy. When the baby moves, the bell rings, pleasing the baby. The bell is discarded when the string attaching it to the clothes breaks.

Villagers also invite lamas and monks to cure sickness. Lamas and monks may tie a finger-sized piece of wood inscribed with Buddhist scriptures to the back of the baby's clothes. Most adults are illiterate and do not know the meaning of the texts.

## RITUALS FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN

Birth celebrations are commonly held only for boys, especially in the case of a couple's first child. However, a family with several sons may wish for a daughter, and celebrate if a girl is born. Wealthy families celebrate the birth of every child.

Celebrations are held on the seventh day after the birth, which is the same day the child's name is formally announced. The child's maternal relatives are the most important guests. They bring a live sheep and new Tibetan robes, including clothes for the baby. Gifts are displayed publically at the party, offering a chance to display the wealth of the child's maternal family and the esteem in which they hold the child's paternal family. Meat, dumplings, and other foods are prepared and consumed. Males drink liquor, sing, and tell jokes. The party commences at around ten a.m. and concludes at around sunset.

The next activity held after the baby's birth is the giving of gifts to village children. Female family members prepare candies and fist-sized bread buns and give them to villagers aged six to fifteen. Any family member except for the new mother goes door to door throughout the village. The family hopes that their child will have a happy future by giving such gifts and delighting the village children.

When a baby turns one,<sup>26</sup> the child's head is shaved, regardless of gender. The hair is rolled into a ball and tied to the back of the baby's clothes along with the bell, the piece of wood with Buddhist scripture, and the metal arrow (if *lcag mda' lcag bzhus* has been performed) to protect the baby and keep it healthy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> During the child's first New Year celebrations.

<sup>27</sup> Frick (1957:186) states that:

## CONCLUSION

The expense of hospital treatment was historically such that it was only utilized in the case of emergency. Furthermore, women are reluctant to give birth in the hospital in fear their vaginal passage will be cut, causing much pain and prolonging recovery. Despite this, increasing numbers of women now give birth in hospital. Women who do not are gossiped about; some suggest that their families do not care about them, or that the families are too poor to afford hospitalization. The practices described in this paper are performed less frequently, and are likely to disappear in the next generation.

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A baby's head is usually shaved shortly before the festival celebrated a month after its birth. This 'fruit hair' as it is called, is moistened with spittle and rolled into a little ball, which is later fastened to the infant's first dress...

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TIBETAN WORD LIST

*bang ma* བང་མ།, a mother during post-natal confinement

*bang zas* བང་ཟས།, fried bread made from dough containing  
much rapeseed oil

*bla 'bod* ལྷ་འབོད།, soul calling

*chu ma* རྩ་མ།, village with irrigated field

*'dre* འདྲེ།, ghost

*gdon* གདོན།, evil spirit

*grib* གྲིབ།, pollution, defilement

*he tse* ཧེ་ཙེ།, heated sleeping platform

*ja nag* ཇ་ནག།, black tea

*jin* ཇིན། (rgya ma རྩ་མ།), *jin* 斤, a unit of weight measurement

*las ngan* ལས་ངན།, bad luck

*lcags mda' lcags bzhus* ལྷགས་མདའ་ལྷགས་བཟུས།, melt metal to  
make a metal arrow

*lo lo ma skrag, ma skrag* ལོ་ལོ་མ་སྐྱག་ མ་སྐྱག།, baby don't be  
afraid, don't be afraid

*lte thag* ལྷེ་ཐག།, umbilical cord

*ma ma* མ་མ།, midwife

*ma Ni* མ་ཤི།, Tibetan Buddhist mantra

*mchin pa lhung ba* མཆིན་པ་ལྷུང་བ།, descended liver

*mu'u* མུའུ།, *mu* མུ།, a unit of land measurement

*nas phye* ནས་ཕྱེ།, sour barley bread

*ri ma* རི་མ།, village with unirrigated field

*rlung* ལྷུང་།, air, wind, vital essence

*rtsam pa* རྩམ་པ།, roasted barley flour

*rtsed rogs* རྩེད་རོགས།, afterbirth, literally 'play friend'

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*rtsi to* རྩོམ་རྩོམ་, a tall, thin, weak-stemmed plant used to make  
brooms that is easily blown over by wind

*skrag phud* སྐྱལ་ཕུད་, expel fear

*tha bkrus* ཐ་བཀུས་, ash washing

DMU RDO: A POWERFUL HERO AND  
MOUNTAIN DEITY

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ABSTRACT

Dmu rdo (Rgyas bzang dialect: mɜ ɖa) accounts were frequently heard in Rgyas bzang (Jizong) Village, Kha mdo (Shuizi) Township, Rong brag (Danba) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, PR China in 2010. An account of a pilgrimage to Dmu rdo in 1993 is given, along with a Dmu rdo story in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and in English translation.

KEY WORDS

Danba, Dmu rdo, heroes, Murdo, Rong brag, Rgyas bzang

## INTRODUCTION

Rgyas bzang (Jizong) Village, Kha mdo (Shuizi) Township, Rong brag (Danba) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province, PR China is home to fifty-five households (forty-nine Tibetan households; six Han Chinese<sup>1</sup> households) and has a total population of 250. Villagers cultivate barley, potatoes, wheat, peas, prickly ash (Sichuan pepper), apples, English walnuts, pears, and corn. Rgyas bzang villagers and residents of nearby Khrimis ri (Changna) and La rgyab (Najiao) villages speak nearly the same distinctive Tibetan dialect.

G.yung 'brug (b. 1985) provides an account of a pilgrimage he and his parents made to Dmu rdo<sup>2</sup> in 1993 when he was eight years old. A Dmu rdo story is also presented in the International Phonetic Alphabet and in English translation.

Coincidentally, G.yung 'brug was at Dmu rdo Mountain at the time Samten Karmay (b. 1936) visited Gyalrong (Rgyal rong), who later wrote 'The Cult of Mount Murdo in Gyalrong' (1996).<sup>3</sup> Karmay does not, however, give an

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<sup>1</sup> The families officially classified as Han have lived in the village for two or three generations. They speak the local language fluently (and at home), engage in the same religious activities as locals classified as Tibetan, have both Chinese and Tibetan names, and marry both those classified as Han and Tibetan.

<sup>2</sup> We were told about a collection of Dmu rdo stories (presented in Chinese and Tibetan languages) published by the Sichuan Nationalities Culture Press in Chengdu. However, we were unable to locate a copy of this book or further verify its existence.

<sup>3</sup> An earlier, very short, imaginative travel account of a visit to Dmu rdo was written by Edgar (1924:28-29):

account of Dmu rdo's origins. He notes:

The use of the term 'birthday' (*'khrungs skar*)<sup>4</sup> for the celebration of the mountain is unusual. It is not mentioned in the guide of the Sangye lingpa [Sangs rgyas gling pa]. In my opinion, it is a reflection of the folktales in which people tell that such-and-such a mountain is born, married, has children and goes through adventures and conflicts.

The similarities between A myes sgo ldong (based on the summary account given in Prins 2007:203-204) and Dmu rdo (as given in this paper) are striking – both boys have insatiable appetites and for this reason are abandoned in the forest. Later, a parent returns to the forest to find the hero and persuades him to return to his home to defeat a demon. When the hero agrees and returns he demands a huge meal, which he is provided, and defeats the demon. It should be noted, however, that G.yung 'brug found no one in Rgyas bzang Village who had heard of A myes sgo ldong.

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The name Murdo (Dmu rdo) means the "Stone of Satan" and the worship and homage would therefore be offered to appease his anger. It is said to be the reason of the peculiar virginity girdles common in Badi and Bawang. The god, I was told, claims the maidens and this girdle is the outward sign of his ownership.

<sup>4</sup> Rgyas bzang residents use the honorific *tɕɛ rɪð* to refer to the birthday of Dmu rdo, reincarnation lamas, and the Buddha. The term *tɕɛ dɕe* (*skyes skar*) is used to refer to an ordinary person's birthday.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Dmu rdo<sup>5</sup> Mountain is the abode of Dmu rdo, arguably the chief mountain deity in the Rgyal rong area, as attested to by a number of oral and written accounts. Dmu rdo Mountain is also known as G.yung drung ri bo dbus rtse, Sku lha dbang phyug ri bo, and Rig 'dzin mkha' 'gro ma'i 'dus gnas (Karmay 1996:1; Sang rgyas gling pa 2005:375).

Liu (2009), Xu (2009), and Lin (2008) all relate brief, mythical accounts of the deity's successes in battle, which, they agree, gave rise to the eminence and supremacy of Dmu rdo in the region. In contrast, Karmay (1996:10) explains the historicity of the creation of Mount Dmu rdo as a *gnas ri* 'holy mountain' that required prophecy and appearance of *gter ston* 'textual treasure revealers' to uncover concealed books and objects, a circumambulation route, identification of traces of early dwellers along the circumambulation path, and a designated date for circumambulation.

Karmay (1996:13) states that despite the recognition of Dmu rdo as a 'pure' *gnas ri* in a guide of Dmu rdo Mountain by Sangs rgyas gling pa, contemporary Rgyal rong people revere Dmu rdo as both a *gnas ri* and the abode of a *yul lha* 'local deity', as is the case with A myes rma chen.<sup>6</sup> Dmu rdo is venerated to purify one's bad deeds in previous rebirths and meanwhile, as a *yul lha*. Dmu rdo is also

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<sup>5</sup> IPA (International Phonetic Alphabetic) symbols are used to record certain of the Rgyas bzang Tibetan dialect, Wylie for transcriptions of literary Tibetan, and *pinyin* for Chinese terms. The term 'Shar dkyil rgyal mo dmu rdo' is used by Rgyas bzang villagers when praying to this mountain deity. Local people are unable to explain how the prefix *shar dkyil rgyal mo* 'middle east queen' relates to Dmu rdo.

<sup>6</sup> Located in Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southeastern Qinghai Province, A myes Rma chen/ Rma rgyal spom ra ranks fourth among the nine creator-deities (*srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu*) of Tibet.

consulted for mundane affairs.

Locals circumambulate the mountain and conduct offering rituals to celebrate the '*khrungs skar* 'birthday' of Dmu rdo on the tenth day of the Horse Month and particularly in the Horse Year. Karmay states (1996:14) that Dran pa nam mkha'<sup>7</sup> was born in a Horse Year<sup>8</sup> and visited Dmu rdo Mountain, as is the case with Mount Ti se.<sup>9</sup> The Horse Year is considered the best year for circumambulating both mountains. Likewise, according to Karmay, in the Rnying ma tradition, because Padmasambhava was born in the Year of the Monkey, Rnying ma adherents celebrate rituals on the tenth day of a month, or in the Monkey Month, and particularly in the Monkey Year. The same pattern was followed in both cases. Karmay thus suggests that locals mistook the birthday of Dran pa nam mkha' for that of Dmu rdo.

Kar+ma rgyal mtshan (2005) includes a short prayer dedicated to Dmu rdo by Bai ro tsa na,<sup>10</sup> *The Merits from Circumambulating Dmu rdo Mountain* by Sang rgyas gling pa, and a guide to Dmu rdo Mountain by Byang chub rdo rje (in three parts). The section entitled *Introduction of Merits from Circumambulating Dmu rdo Mountain* states that merit earned from continual circumambulation of the mountain in

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<sup>7</sup> A renowned master of the Bon tradition; one of Padmasambhava's twenty-five disciples; the Master of Bai ro tsa na (Vairocana).

<sup>8</sup> A Tibetan calendar that features a cycle of twelve years and twelve months in a year, each (month or year) named for one of twelve animals—mouse, bull, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig.

<sup>9</sup> Located in western Tibet, it is also known as Mount Kailash/ Gangs rin po che.

<sup>10</sup> Vairocana. See Schaeffer (2000) for a detailed treatment of this important Tibetan translator who lived during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (Khri strong lde'u btsan, r 755-797) and was an important disciple of Padmasambhava.



a non-Horse Month or non-Horse Year is equivalent to reciting the Six Sacred Syllables 700 million times; a single circumambulation in the Horse Month of a year is the equivalent of reciting the Six Sacred Syllables 1.2 billion times; and a single circumambulation in the Horse Month of the Year of the Horse equals holding a Stong mchod 'Thousand-fold Offering Ritual' and reciting the Six Sacred Syllables 1.3 billion times.

Btsan lha ngag dbang et al. (2003) includes the accounts outlined above in *Karma rgyal mtshan* (2005). The exception is that Btsan lha ngag dbang et al. (2003) provides an introduction of the major temple at the foot of Dmu rdo Mountain. The sketchy introduction suggests that a thousand circumambulations of Dmu rdo Mountain in one's lifetime is best and that 113 times is the minimum.

According to a consultant cited by Xu (2009:14), Dmu rdo Mountain should be circumambulated at least three times in one's lifetime—the first time to bring blessings to one's father, the second time for one's mother, and the third time for one's self.

Liu's examination of Tibetan pilgrimage in Danba (2009:55) states that Rgyal rong or Rgyal mo tsha ba rong is named after Dmu rdo/ Shar rgyal mo Mountain, its surrounding geographical shape, and the Rgyal mo rngul chu, the major river in the Rgyal rong area. Liu (2009:56) also describes three different circuits around Dmu rdo Mountain. The shortest route runs around Dmu rdo Temple and its immediate vicinity, the second goes only to the summit, and the third is all the way along the foot of Dmu rdo Mountain without ascending the mountain.

Liu's study of folk narratives of Dmu rdo Mountain and fertility and its role in worship (2009:41-42) mentions the issue of Dmu rdo's gender. He points out that few scholars think the deity is female, as suggested by the full name (Shar rgyal mo dmu rdo)—the majority, including Rgyal rong people, agree that the deity is male.

Karmay (2005:322) asserts that mountains are understood as the abodes of male deities while nearby lakes

are seen as that of their goddess consorts. However, there are certain examples of female deities residing in mountains, such as A ma Sman btsun and A ma Zo/ Zor dgu in eastern A mdo and Rdzong A ye De'u in western Khams, challenging the notion that all mountains are male deities.

## PILGRIMAGE TO MOUNT DMU RDO

Many boys beg their parents for candy, new clothes, and toys, but Rgyas bzang children want to grow up quickly, so they can visit Dmu rdo Mountain to see the hero featured in stories told by village elders. When children are naughty, parents say "Don't be naughty, or we won't take you to Dmu rdo Mountain." Villagers believe seven year old boys should circumambulate Dmu rdo Mountain on the tenth day of the seventh lunar month—Dmu rdo's birthday. Dmu rdo gives power that makes boys brave, honest, and good men. Evil avoids you once you visit Dmu rdo Mountain.

On Dmu rdo's birthday, my parents, eighteen other villagers, and I made a pilgrimage to Dmu rdo Mountain. We left home at seven a.m. Father dressed me in an unusual way—I had a red cloth band around my head which was about three centimeters wide and thirty centimeters long. Though the weather was already hot, I wore a winter robe, and a Tibetan knife with a pair of ivory chopsticks encased in the sheath hung from my sash. Tibetan boots made me hotter. I found other boys dressed like me when my parents and I met the other pilgrims at the village entrance just before we all set off together.

We reached Dmu rdo Temple, situated at the foot of the mountain, at about noon. I wondered why we were walking to Dmu rdo Temple when many cars passed by. Father held my hand tightly because he was worried the cars might hit me. Villagers never rode. Father said that if we rode, it had no meaning because we should walk when on pilgrimages. The Buddha and the mountain deity would think we were not sincere and would not grant our wishes if

we rode—the more hardship the more merit. Those in cars were city dwellers and Chinese. People who lived in the mountains walked to Dmu rdo Temple and then climbed Dmu rdo Mountain.

Countless people were around Dmu rdo Temple. It was my first time to see so many people. I ran toward the crowd but Father caught me and said that some children had gotten lost in this festival in the last three years and he didn't want to lose his son. Our group wanted to prostrate to the Dmu rdo image but we couldn't move forward because of the crowd. Finally we gave up, because our destination was still far away. Father and two men from our group hung *rlung rta* 'prayer flags'<sup>11</sup> on the *la btsas* by Dmu rdo Temple.

Our group continued on and when we passed a village, an old man offered us tea and candy when he learned we were going to Dmu rdo Mountain. He gave Father a bag of wheat flour and asked him to offer it to Dmu rdo. There were two groups on pilgrimage to Dmu rdo Mountain in front of us and another group was not far behind.

We met about 200 people who had visited Dmu rdo Mountain and were returning home. Father told me that about 600 people visit Dmu rdo Mountain every year. There is another route to Dmu rdo Mountain for Bon believers. We could not see them except from the top of Dmu rdo Mountain. I then realized why some of our group members

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<sup>11</sup> This term may refer to square pieces of paper about six centimeters square (size varies) imprinted with a horse in the center bearing a wish-fulfilling gem and a tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon in the four corners in various Tibetan areas. However, in the local context relevant to this paper, *rlung rta* refers to pieces of white, green, and red cloth (about twenty centimeters long and twelve centimeters wide) that feature images from wood blocks of a horse in the center bearing a wish-fulfilling gem. Scriptures are featured around the horse.

had disappeared.

It was already dark when our group reached Nor pu phug, the halfway point to Dmu rdo Mountain. There are several large caves, each about one hundred square meters in area. These caves are considered Bai ro tsa na's meditation places. According to local accounts, he came to Rgyal mo tsha ba rong for about sixteen years to meditate and spent much of this time in the vicinity of Dmu rdo Mountain.

We luckily found a vacant cave. Father told us to rest there and then he and another man went to fetch water from a mountain spring. The women made beds with our cloth bags and clothes. We had brought butter tea, *rtsam pa*, bread, pork, and wheat liquor. We had a nice meal. I wore my winter robe when it was time to sleep. Boys slept at the front of the cave with the men. There were no blankets for us. We boys made a big fire, sat around it, and then went to sleep.

The next day we reached grassland with many stupas along both sides of the road. Father said Bai ro tsa na made 108 stupas there in one night. We scattered auspicious wheat seeds to the stupas as an offering.<sup>12</sup> After we passed the stupas, Father and elders prostrated to a *la btsas* where many people were burning *bsang*, circumambulating, and hanging wind horses on the prayer flags.

Our group chanted Skyabs 'gro:<sup>13</sup>

Bla ma la skyabs su mchi'o  
Sangs rgyas la skyabs su mchi'o

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<sup>12</sup> The seeds are taken from a box on the third floor of the home, where grain is stored, and put in a small cloth bag, and then referred to as 'auspicious seed'.

<sup>13</sup> Literally 'taking refuge' (in the lama, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), a short scripture chanted before reciting Buddhist prayers or longer scriptures.

Chos la skyabs su mchi'o  
Dge 'dun la skyabs su mchi'o

and asked the boys to prostrate to Dmu rdo Mountain. We followed, chanting, prostrating, and praying to Dmu rdo La btsas as we passed along a narrow rocky path to Dmu rdo. I was told bad people would fall into the valley as they walked along this path.

Father handed me auspicious wheat seeds, which I scattered to Dmu rdo La btsas. Money, clothes, candy, and wind horses were inside the *la btsas*. Mothers gave boys *kha btags*<sup>14</sup> to offer Dmu rdo La btsas. I offered mine and prayed that I would have power in the future.

More than a hundred people were circumambulating Dmu rdo La btsas. From atop Dmu rdo Mountain, we saw a lake changing from green to blue to green near Dmu rdo La btsas. Those who circumambulate the lake once will remain human in their next life.

Several nomad families lived near the lake. It was my first time to see yaks.

One of our group members felt dizzy and we thus did not visit the lake but returned home. On the way back, we visited a stupa that had sprung up in a place where Dmu rdo had rested. I tried to understand Dmu rdo's magic power but I failed, because my little brain couldn't figure it out.

•••

By 2010, I had visited Dmu rdo Temple five times on Dmu rdo's birthday. My most recent visit was on the seventh day of the first lunar month in 2009, when I went with my younger brother. We left home at about eight a.m. and walked to Shuizi Township Town, which we reached at about nine-thirty a.m. We then hired a taxi to Dmu rdo Temple for fifteen RMB (one way).

We reached the temple at around ten a.m. My

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<sup>14</sup> Tibetan ceremonial scarf.

younger brother offered *bsang* at the *la btsas* by the temple, and hung wind horses by the temple. There were a few people circumambulating the temple.

A monk was chanting beside the *la btsas* as people offered *bsang*. Visitors asked the monk to give them *srung mdud*<sup>15</sup> and asked such questions as: "Where should I go to earn money?" "When can my son get a job?" "What's the best time to hold a wedding?" The monk used his thumb to quickly move beads on this prayer-bead string, closed his eyes, and gave an answer a couple of minutes later. Once satisfied with the monk's response, they put money in a box by the monk. My younger brother and I asked the monk for about twenty *srung mdud* for our family and relatives, put a total of ten RMB in his box, and thanked him when he gave them to us.

We left Dmu rdo Temple in a taxi after an hour of circumambulating and prostrating to the Dmu rdo image. On the way back to the township town, I asked my younger brother what he had prayed for. He said he had asked Dmu rdo for power, and to help him pass exams to get a government job (which he later got). I feel Dmu rdo really does have power to encourage people to do what they want.

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<sup>15</sup> A *srung mdud* is a red or yellow string about thirty centimeters long. A lama, monk, or *sgom pa* (yogin, meditator, ascetic) uses a conifer twig to flick holy water on such strings and blows on the strings while chanting. Such strings are believed to bring good luck and prevent sickness, and are worn around the neck.

## THE STORY

### Background

When a person's honesty is in question, e.g., regarding the truthfulness of something that was said or if there is suspicion of theft, the person being questioned might say, "If I am lying (If I stole something), I swear I'll go to Dmu rdo Mountain La btsas a hundred times." This statement has such power that the person is generally believed. The efficacy of visiting Dmu rdo Mountain Lab btsas a hundred times is seen as equivalent to visiting Lha sa a hundred times.

I learnt this story (below) from my paternal grandmother, A rtse (1940-1993). I liked to listen to elders tell stories when I was a child. When villagers finished dinner, they visited homes with good storytellers. Children particularly liked to listen to stories at night, and dared not go outside to the toilet when elders told ghost stories. People sat around the *ʔdza bṭ*<sup>16</sup> and listened to the storyteller, who sat on a cow or sheep skin with a bottle of liquor near the head of the *ʔdza bṭ*. Before the story began, the storyteller offered three offerings of liquor. If the storyteller was female, she held prayer beads and counted the beads while telling the stories. If a man told stories, he held a tobacco pipe. When he told the climactic part, he frequently stopped and smoked, heightening interest in his story, causing children to

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<sup>16</sup> The *ʔdza bṭ* is one of three hearthstones that has the shape of an upside-down capital J with the hook facing up and turning to the left (inside). This stone is the *kə tɛ* 'upper place' *ʔdza bṭ*. The other two stones are called *kə ɲdzṭ* 'lower place'. The hearth (including all three stones) is also called *ʔdza bṭ*. A pot is placed at the convergence of the three *ʔdza bṭ*. The *ʔdza kɔ* is a small shelf on the upper part of the stone, just before it turns to the left. The *ʔdza kɔ* is about two and a half centimeters long and about three centimeters wide. Food is placed here for the deities.

impatiently ask him what happened next.

Several people often came to my home to listen to stories with candy for Grandmother. We offered tea to the audience when Grandmother finished. Listeners commented by criticizing story characters and drank liquor. However, when television came to the village in the early twenty-first century, people lost interest in storytelling.

## DMU RDO'S BIRTH AND POWER

Several centuries ago, under the deities' protection, all was well in the mystical, auspicious place known as Rgyal mo tsha ba rong, where the teachings of the Buddha were strictly observed by local Tibetans. Many old stone towers were multi-angled. Some had four, others had eight, and still others had thirteen faces. This famous place of local kings and heroes was also known as a 'flower of the Earth'.

One day, a Tibetan woman went into the forest to cut firewood. That day, feeling more tired than usual, she lay down on a bright green rock under a towering tree. She fell asleep and dreamed of a dark sky full of black clouds from which emerged a dragon that glanced at her. Filled with fear, she awakened. And thus it was that she later gave birth to a son who was called Dmu rdo.

When Dmu rdo grew up, his mother could not satisfy his voracious appetite. His appetite was larger than that of eight people. His mother then sent him to a primeval forest on Dmu rdo Mountain where he gained great power. Thanks to the deities' teachings, he became a man who was immensely strong and very clever. Hunters in the forest saw him run faster than the wild animals he was hunting; some said he could run as fast as the wind.

One day, the villagers were threatened by ghosts and demons. Consequently, the tribal chief sent boys and girls every day for the demons and ghosts to eat. All the local people felt they were in terrible danger and began to discuss Dmu rdo's supernatural abilities. Certain villagers



finally suggested to the tribal chief that they ask Dmu rdo to deal with the demons and ghosts.

The chief then asked Dmu rdo's mother to invite her son back to the village.

Dmu rdo's mother brought eighteen pig's ears, ten pig's legs, eight pig's tails, and *rtsam pa* to the forest. Standing on the bright green rock where she had given birth to her son, she called, "Dmu rdo!"<sup>17</sup>

There was no reply. All she could see were piles of animal bones. Then she sang the song she had sung to Dmu rdo when he was a little child before she sent him to the forest. Suddenly, a man flew to her from a mountain peak and acknowledged her as his mother. She wept while embracing him and related everything that had happened in the village.

Dmu rdo said she should tell the chief to prepare plenty of food for his arrival and added that he would visit the village three days later. His mother returned to the village and, three days later, Dmu rdo appeared atop the highest stone tower in the village. He shouted three times and the clouds in the sky vanished. He then flew into the chief's home, ate the food that they had prepared, and told the villagers that they shouldn't fear the demons and ghosts.

After he finished eating, he gathered his bow and arrows and flew to the demons and ghosts. He fought with Bru mo byid bdun, the leader of the ghosts, for one whole night before he finally killed her. The other ghosts then fled.

Thereafter, the village resumed its normal life. Villagers were grateful to Dmu rdo and sincerely wanted him to live in the village with them, but he had to return to Dmu rdo Mountain. However, Dmu rdo agreed to spend the New Year holidays with the villagers each year. From then

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Berounský comments: "*Dmu* are heavenly beings represented by the dragon and *rdo* is the stone/ rock in the story."

on, every day before the New Year, villagers painted the outside of their houses with white soil to signal that it was time for Dmu rdo to visit. This is why every household in the Rgyal mo tsha ba rong area whitewashes the outside of their houses with paint made from a special white soil.

## THE TEXT IN IPA

### *m3 dæ*

- <sup>1</sup>χæ riŋ χæ riŋ dza la naŋ ʔo ge ka tʂæ̃ la də dza mɔh̃ ʔ tsʰa  
wa roŋ də ŋda di ŋdu di tʂə bu ʃai tʂʰaŋ sə  
<sup>2</sup>pəh̃ ʔ mbu ge tʂʰoŋ də nə sa tʂʰau zi zao ta tʂaŋ sə  
<sup>3</sup>pəh̃ ʔ ji sa tʂʰo pə mbu ge tʂʰoŋ tʰao so kʰa noŋ moŋ ji s3 la  
kʰa z3 d3 z3 dʒah tʂ3 saŋ  
<sup>4</sup>dzei budon pa wo tʂe sʂ ge sa tʂʰo je tʂʰã s3  
<sup>5</sup>ta rĩ soŋ ne de ndzaŋ liŋ d3ŋ ge mb3 due je s3 la ja  
<sup>6</sup>niã tʂu dza la p3 p3 m3ŋ de dʒi d3 la χo ʕiŋ tʂa ŋg3 tʂʰaŋ  
se  
<sup>7</sup>de niã la d3 d3 ge χæ la don me tʂo tʂʰã s3  
<sup>8</sup>m3 de ʕe la zi zao saŋ tʂʰã s3 tæ m3 d3 je du de dʒi diŋ ʕe  
tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>9</sup>ji tʂu mɔ̃ r3 niŋ d3 moŋ tʂu la m3 l3ŋ te tʕi meŋ tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>10</sup>m3 l3ŋ loŋ n3 d3 ndzu de tʕi d3 tʂæ ne s3 loŋ tʂo  
tʂʰaŋ s3 <sup>11</sup>ng3 d3 m3 la nʒ3 n3 ndʒ3 pue tʂ3 j3 tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>12</sup>p3 m3ŋ d3 tʂe la m3ŋ pa sa tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>13</sup>d3 ge gu dʒao d3 p3 r3 tʂʰ3 gi de tʕi tʂʰ3 tsʰaŋ s3  
<sup>14</sup>tʂʰ3 gi la d3 m3 du de tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>15</sup>m3 du j3j3 dʒa s3ŋ d3 sã mi g3 so dʒ3 tʰæ nliŋ kʰue ge ma  
gæ g3 su me tʂʰo tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>16</sup>m3 du g3 sa tʰæ dʒ3 nloŋ m3 ndo dʒa ge sa tʰæ dʒ3 sou  
tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>17</sup>m3 dæ gi ma gæ na tʰao s3 m3 tʂʰaŋ s3  
<sup>18</sup>tʰæ nliŋ d3 m3 dæ d3 χæ la ma gæ̃ m3 m3ŋ tʂʰ3 so d3 dæ

- ts<sup>h</sup>ɔ̌ donj ge la ɕe tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɜ  
19 nan̩ ɬɔ t<sup>h</sup>an̩ rĩ dɜ ge ka tɕ<sup>h</sup>æ̌ la  
20 mɜ dɐ ge nan̩ ɬɔ gɜ tɕɜ ɕe tɕɜ mɜ gɜ tɕ<sup>h</sup>e tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɜ  
21 la ɣɔ ɕon̩ dɜɜ ge nɜ tɕ<sup>h</sup>u tɕu ge mɜ dɐ  
22 ŋjæ̌ tɕɐ dɜa lah<sup>ˀ</sup>, tɕon̩ bɔ la dɔ ŋtɕi donj sɐ mən̩ gə ŋæ̌ jə  
tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
23 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ dɔ tɕon̩ bæ̌ gə sɐ mən̩ la pə rə tɕ<sup>h</sup>əh<sup>ˀ</sup> gi donj pə mən̩  
tɕ<sup>h</sup>əh<sup>ˀ</sup> gi ta gə tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
24 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ ji bɔ ruh<sup>ˀ</sup> tɕu zə zau tɕe tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
25 tæ̌ mɜ dɐ gə tɕə ntɕɔ tɕ<sup>h</sup>ɔ tɕan̩ sɔ la ʃa tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
26 tɕon̩ bæ̌ gə tæ̌ liŋ mɜ dɐ gi ma gæ̌ la zə ʃa ŋgə rɛ sɔ tɕan̩ sɔ  
27 mɜ dɐ gi ma gæ̌ gə tsa mbɔ p<sup>h</sup>e na tɕɐ tɕon̩ dɜa p<sup>h</sup>e kon̩  
tɕə̌ donj p<sup>h</sup>e ndzɐ dɜa k<sup>h</sup>ə̌ la la ɣɔ ŋgə tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
28 mɜ dɐ gi ma gæ̌ gə dɔ hæ̌ la mɜ dɐ k<sup>h</sup>ə̌ sɔ gi tu dən̩ ntɕin̩  
mɛ̌ dɐ la mpə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
29 gə ton̩ sɔ la mpə̌ la mon̩ tsə̌ rəh<sup>ˀ</sup> sin̩ tə̌ luě tɕ<sup>h</sup>ě məh<sup>ˀ</sup> mə̌  
tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
30 tɕɐ rə bɔ tə̌ mon̩ mon̩ jah<sup>ˀ</sup> tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
31 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ ma gæ̌ gə læ̌ læ̌ jə tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
32 mɜ dɐ gə ma gæ̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>ɐ̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>ɐ̌ sin̩ məh<sup>ˀ</sup> la læ̌ mə̌ tə̌ kɐ̌ sin̩ tə̌  
mp<sup>h</sup>ai la bə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>anǧ sɔ  
33 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ ma gæ̌ gə mɜ dɐ la ʃa tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ tɕon̩ bɔ non̩ tsə̌ ndzɔ  
rə̌ la ja la sɔ  
34 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ mɜ dɐ gə ma gæ̌ la ʃa sən̩ sɔ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩  
35 tɕon̩ bæ̌ la sɛ̌ dɔ t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ tæ̌ lan̩ tɕə̌ bə̌ jə̌ la t<sup>h</sup>ǎ tæ̌ ŋa ŋɜ̌ ma san̩  
lon̩ tɕon̩ lən̩ bə̌ jon̩ mɛ̌ sɔ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
36 ŋə̌ ma san̩ gi kɐ̌ dzaǔ nə̌ mɜ dɐ gi tɕon̩ bɔ lon̩ k<sup>h</sup>ǎ tin̩ baǔ  
pə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
37 gə̌ ki læ̌ san̩ ton̩ sin̩ dɔ nan̩ nən̩ ki tɕæ̌ ŋɛ̌ lan̩ ŋgə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
38 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ tɕon̩ bæ̌ rɛ̌ ki tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ lon̩ ŋgə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
39 tɕ<sup>h</sup>ən̩ bæ̌ kə̌ ntɕæ̌ tæ̌ lan̩ tɛ̌ tɕǐ jə̌ tɕan̩ sɔ  
40 sɛ̌ sɔ t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ sin̩ tə̌ ntɔ̌ k<sup>h</sup>ə̌ la ŋgə̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ ntɕə̌ mon̩ ɕæ̌ dæ̌ tə̌ sǎ  
la ɕɛ̌ tɕ<sup>h</sup>an̩ sɔ  
41 k<sup>h</sup>ǎ hɔ̌ rɐ̌ tɕɐ̌ dɔ lan̩ tɕě ŋgə̌ tɕan̩ sɔ  
42 t<sup>h</sup>æ̌ liŋ tɕon̩ bɔ tə̌ hæ̌ ki don̩ tɕə̌a ntɕɔ̌ rə̌ tɕan̩ sɔ

<sup>43</sup>tʃəŋ mə ʃi bə kə mɜ dɐ la tʃəŋ bə loŋ tsə da tɕʰɐ saŋ tʃʰaŋ  
sə

<sup>44</sup>mɜ dɐ la ɣɔ lɐ̃ŋ ngə gɛ tʃʰaŋ sə

<sup>45</sup>tʃəŋ mə ʃi bə kə mɜ dɐ la lə sɐhʻ tʃəŋ bə loŋ ŋaŋ ʃə tsə ʃə  
tɕʰɐ sə tʃʰaŋ sə

<sup>46</sup>lu tʰɔ tʰɔ ki taŋ mpɔ loŋ tɕʰaŋ la sɐ ka dzæ siŋ tə mɜ dɐ kə  
la sɐhʻ tʃəŋ bə loŋ ʃə tɕʰaŋ sə

<sup>47</sup>tahʻ rɛ soŋ ŋɛ sə laŋ ntʃɔ liŋ dʒa mɔhʻ tsʰa wa roŋ loŋ sɐ  
ka lu rɛ rɛ ki dzæ tɕʰaŋ sə

## CONCLUSION

Rgyas bzang villagers believe that three brothers became mountain deities, known locally as Tsa ri spun gsum. They reside in Tsa ri Mountain. Five to six hours is required to walk to the top of this mountain from the village. G.yung 'brug has never heard individual names for the three brothers used. Rather, the term Tsa ri spun gsum is used to signify a collective mountain deity.

Tsa ri spun gsum is sacrificed to and help is requested at such times as when there is drought, sickness, livestock are stolen or missing, and before examinations (in the hope Tsa ri spun gsum will help the students score higher on important exams). Tsa ri spun gsum is also asked to punish people who harm a family, e.g., steal a family's livestock.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A butter lamp is offered on a large stone in the village where a goat is killed and offered to Tsa ri spun gsum on the thirteenth day of the seventh lunar month. The base of this stone—the largest in the village—is about six meters long, stands about eight or nine meters tall, and is about two meters thick. The top of the stone has been chiseled into a circle with a diameter of about one and a half meters. The family seeking redress ascends a path adjacent to the stone,

Elders in a home who feel they are neglected may warn other family members that "Tsa ri spun gsum has eyes," suggesting that the mountain deity will punish them.

In contrast to Tsa ri spun gsum's personal and interventionist roles, Dmu rdo is a cultural-national hero, as indicated in the account below told by G.yung 'brug, based on what he has heard from Rgyas bzang villagers. The story reflects a strong sense of pride in local history (such accounts are passed down orally from one generation to another) and in distinctive local features, i.e., the stone watchtowers and Dmu rdo:

During the time of the Qing Dynasty (1644 to 1912), over an eight year period, the Qing soldiers fought the Tibetan forces, but only suffered defeat. Many more Qing soldiers were sent and the Qing was close to victory. At this point, the Tibetan soldiers offered *bsang* to Dmu rdo, and asked him for help. The sky then suddenly grew dark and Dmu rdo appeared on a black horse, took out soldiers from his robe pouch, scattered them on the battlefield, and the Qing army was soon defeated.

The Qing could not breach the strong stone watchtowers of the Rgyal rong resistance. They then took some local Rgyal rong villagers to Beijing where the villagers explained how the local resistance fighters got food and water. Armed with this information, the Qing forces poisoned water supplies that flowed to the watchtowers. Soldiers drank the poisoned water, died, and the Qing soldiers were then able to conquer the Rgyal rong area.

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places a butter lamp atop it, and requests that the offending family be punished.



Mount Dmu rdo. Photo taken by Dkar bzang nyi ma in 2001 in Spro snang Village, Spro snang Township, Rong brag County.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

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*ʔdza bṭ* hearthstone (Literary Tibetan ཐབ་རྩོ། *thab rdo*)

*ʔdza kɔ* place on the upper hearthstone for offering food to  
the Hearth Deity

A

A ma Sman btsun ཨ་མ་སྐུན་བཙུན།

A ma Zo/ Zor dgu ཨ་མ་ཟོ/ཟོར་དགུ།

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།

A myes sgo ldong ཨ་མེས་སྐོ་ལྷོང་།

A rtse ཨ་རུཙེ (1940-1993), G.yung 'brug's paternal  
grandmother

A ye De'u ཨ་ཡེ་དེ་འུ།

B

Badi 巴底, a township in Rong brag County; Brag sten བྲག་སྡེང་།

Bai ro tsa na བེ་རོ་ཙ་ན་ལ།

Bawang 巴旺

Beijing 北京

Bla ma la skyabs su mchi'o ལྷ་མ་ལ་སྐུབས་སུ་མཆིའོ།

Brag sten བྲག་སྡེང་།; Badi 巴底

Bru mo byid bdun བྲུ་མོ་བྱིད་བདུན།

*bsang* བསང་།

*bstan ma* བསྐྱུན་མ།

Byang chub rdo rje བྱང་ཅུབ་རྩོ་རྗེ།

C

Changna 长纳

Chengdu 成都

Chos la skyabs su mchi'o ཚོས་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆིའོ།

D

Danba 丹巴; Rong brag རོང་བྲག

Dge 'dun la skyabs su mchi'o དགེ་འདུན་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆིའོ།

Dkar bzang nyi ma དཀར་བཟང་ཉི་མ།

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།

Dmu rdo (m3 dæ, Murdo) དམུ་རྫོ།; Moerduo 墨尔多

Dpa' dbang དཔའ་དབང་།; Bawang 巴旺

Dran pa nam mkha' གྲན་པ་ལ་མཁའ་མཁའ།

G

G.yung 'brug གཡུང་འབྲུག

G.yung drung ri bo dbus rtse གཡུང་རྩུང་རི་བོ་དབུས་རྩེ།

Ganzi 甘孜

Gar stong གར་སྟོང་།

*gnas ri* གནས་རི།

H

Han 汉

J

Jizong 吉宗

K

*kə ŋdzɘ* lower place

*kə tɛ* upper place

*kha btags* ཁ་བཏགས།

Kha mdo ཁ་མདོ།

Khams ཁམས།

Khrims ri ཁྲིམས་རི།

*'khrungs skar* འཁྱུངས་སྐར།

L

*la btsas* ལ་བཅས།

*La rgyab* ལ་རྒྱལ།

N

Najiao 纳交

*Nor pu phug* འོ་ཕུ་ཕུག

Q

*Qing* 清

R

*Rgyal mo tsha ba rong* རྒྱལ་མོ་ཙ་བ་རོང་།

*Rgyal rong* (Gyalrong) རྒྱལ་རོང་།

*Rgyas bzang* རྒྱས་བཟང་།

*Rig 'dzin mkha' 'gro ma'i 'dus gnas* རིག་འཛིན་མཁའ་འགྲོ་མའི་  
འདུས་གནས།

*rlung rta* རླུང་རྟ།

*RMB renminbi* 人民币

*Rong brag* རོང་བྲག; *Danba* 丹巴

*rtsam pa* རུས་པ།

S

*Sangs rgyas la skyabs su mchi'o* སངས་རྒྱལ་ལ་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཆོད།

*Sangye lingpa* (*Sangs rgyas gling pa* སངས་རྒྱལ་གླིང་པ།)

*sgom pa* སྒོམ་པ། (meditator)

*Shaanxi* 陕西

*Shuizi* 水子

*Sichuan Nationalities Culture Press* (*Sichuan minzu wenhua*  
*chubanshe* 四川民族文化出版社)

*Sichuan* 四川

Sku lha dbang phyug ri bo སྐུ་ལྷ་དབང་ཕུག་རི་བོ།

Skyabs 'gro སྐུ་བས་འགོ།

Spro snang སྐྱོ་སྣང་།

Srid pa chags pa'i lha dgu སྤེན་པ་ཆགས་པའི་ལྷ་དགུ། (the nine creator-gods)

T

*tɕɛ dʂæ* (*skyes skar*) སྐྱེས་སྐར།; Rgyas bzang residents use *tɕɛ dʂæ* to refer to an ordinary person's birthday

*tɕɛ rɿə* Rgyas bzang residents use *tɕɛ rɿə* to refer to the birthday of Dmu rdo, reincarnation lamas, and the Buddha

Ti se ཏི་སེ།

Trisong Detsen (Khri strong lde btsan ཁྲི་སྟོང་ལྡེ་བཙན།)

Tsa ri spun gsum ཙ་རི་སྤུན་གསུམ།

*tsʰɔŋ ntə* (*srung mdud*) སྤུང་མདུད།

ECHOES FROM *SI GANG LIH*: BURAO YILU'S  
'MOON MOUNTAIN'

Mark Bender (The Ohio State University)

ABSTRACT

Wa poet Burao Yilu's utilization of myth, ritual, and folk customs in representing the Wa ethnic group in the poem 'Moon Mountain' is discussed. Negative stereotypes of the Wa, an indigenous people of southwestern Yunnan Province, China, include the now forbidden practice of headhunting. By referencing the origin myth 'Si gang lih' and evoking images of ancient cliff paintings, rituals, and agricultural practices, Burao offers a nuanced view of Wa culture while affirming deep-rooted aspects of the Wa worldview. As a literary work, 'Moon Mountain' is an example of the Chinese language (Sinophone) poetry being produced by ethnic minority writers in southwest China today.

KEY WORDS

headhunting, Sinophone poetry, Va, Wa, Wazu, Yunnan,

## FIGURES

Figure One. Burao Yilu stands on a hill in the area of the mythical Si gang lih, the cave from which the Wa emerged after the great flood. Bamboo water ducts aid in irrigating the upland fields.

Figure Two. Wa poet Burao Yilu poses by a river of mythical importance to the Wa of southwest Yunnan Province.

Figure Three. Wa poet, Burao Yilu, calls this photo, 'Hope of the Wa Mountains'.

Figure Four. Wa drum dance. One marker of the ritual is young women flinging their hair (Burao Yilu).

Figure Five. Traditional Wa upland village, southwest Yunnan (Burao Yilu).

Figure Six. Wa matrons smoking tobacco pipes (Burao Yilu).

Figure Seven. The Monihei festival is held each May in Cangyuan County, southwest Yunnan. A high point is participants merrily smearing each other with mud (Burao Yilu).

























## INTRODUCTION

'Moon Mountain' ('Yueliang shan 月亮山') is a poem by Burao Yilu 布饶依露, of the Wa<sup>1</sup> ethnic group (Wazu 佤族) of Yunnan Province 云南, China (Burao 2002:58). In the poem, the author combines myth, ritual, and folk customs to engage negative stereotypes of the Wa people, whose traditional practices included headhunting. Written in Chinese, the poem exemplifies how many ethnic minority authors in China utilize the medium of Sinophone poetry to access regional and national literary venues and thus gain profile for themselves and their ethnic groups (Li 2004:11-12). Aside from its value in combating misperceptions and drawing positive attention to Wa culture, a subtext in the poem promotes basic aspects of the Wa worldview.

Often writing under her Han 汉 Chinese name, Wu

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<sup>1</sup> Most Wa live in areas of China and Burma between the Mekong and Salween rivers. Groups sharing aspects of their lifestyle are found as far west as northeastern India. In China, many Wa live in Ximeng 西盟 and Cangyuan 沧源 autonomous counties, as well as in Menglian 孟连, Shuangjiang 双江, Gengma 耿马, Lancang 澜沧, and other counties in southwest Yunnan (Wei 2001:1). An ethnic group spread across several borders, the Wa are estimated to number over one million. Around 400,000 Wa (also known as Awa, Va, Kawa, Parauk, and other names) live in China (Yamada 2007:1-3). Many hundreds of thousands of Wa live in Burma, including a special zone on the Chinese border. Over 20,000 Wa live in Thailand. Their dialects belong to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family (Watkins 2010). See Kramer (2007) for historical and geopolitical perspectives on the areas of Wa inhabitation. \*Special thanks to Burao Yilu, Yifan Pai (Bai Yifan 白奕凡), the editors of *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, and an astute outside reader for contributions to this paper.

Meng 吴萌, Burao Yilu is among the few Wa writers to appear on the Chinese literary stage since the economic reforms of the early 1980s (Wei 1999:86a). As the first accomplished Wa poet and female Wa essayist, her works join the short stories of Dong Xiuying 董秀英 (1949-1996), the first Wa member of the Chinese Writer's Association (Zhongguo zuojia xiehui 中国作家协会), and younger Wa writers such as Wang Xuebing 王学兵 and Zhong Huaqiang 钟华强 (Guo and Shang 1999:360-361, 395-403). A resident of the provincial capital, Kunming 昆明, Burao began writing in 1986, and has worked as a journalist and editor, promoting positive images of the Wa ethnic group in dozens of in-depth articles, essays, and poems published in such well-known journals as *Ethnic Unity* (Minzu tuanjie 民族团结), *Women of China* (Zhongguo funü 中国妇女), *Ethnic Literature* (Minzu wenxue 民族文学), *People's Daily* (Renmin ribao 人民日报), and *People's Government* (Renmin zhengfu 人民政府). She was admitted to the Yunnan Writer's Association (Yunnan sheng zuojia xiehui 云南省作家协会) in 1989 and engaged in advanced literary studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui ke xueyuan 中国社会科学院) in Beijing 北京 in 1995. Her works, including a report on Wa women's issues entitled 'Four Generations of Wa Women' (Wa jia de si dai nüren 佤家四代女人), have won several journalism and literary awards (Wei 2001:273-274). She is presently working on a book of essays (*sanwen* 散文) on Wa culture in the contemporary world.

Growing up in a family with both Wa and Han Chinese roots, Burao is of a mixed cultural background reminiscent of Tibetan novelists Zhaxi Dawa 扎西达瓦 and Alai 阿来 (Schiaffinni-Vedani 2008:204-208). She was born to a Wa mother and a father of Han descent whose family was 'Wa-icized' by marriage. One maternal grandfather was a well-known Wa headman in the pre-1949 era. Paternally, she



is a tenth generation descendant of Wu Shangxian 吴尚贤, a powerful figure in mining interests in Wa territory on the Yunnan and Burma border during the Qing 清 Dynasty (1644-1911).<sup>2</sup> At an early age her family moved from the Wa Mountains to Kunming, where her father was an inventor in an industrial unit. As a young adult she revived connections with her Wa family roots and re-immersed herself in Wa culture.<sup>3</sup>

Like the majority of ethnic-authored literary works published in recent decades, Burao's poems are written in Chinese (Luo 2001; Dayton 2006). As the Wa had no indigenous tradition of writing prior to the 1950s and nothing similar to modernist poetry, Sinophone poetry is a pragmatic medium of expression.<sup>4</sup> Fluency in Modern Standard Chinese opens doors to personal and group advancement and allows direct communication with a diverse audience. In order to compete for cultural 'market share' in today's China, writing in Chinese is a fact of life for the majority of ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> See Fiskesjö (2010a: 250-252) for a discussion of the role of Wu Shangxian 吴尚贤 (d. 1750), a Han 'miner-entrepreneur' involved in brokering relations with Wa 'kings' in exploiting the resources in the Maolong 茂隆 Silver Mines in Wa territory in the eighteenth century. Wu died in prison in 1750 after running afoul of Qing Dynasty authorities.

<sup>3</sup> Burao's daughter, Burao Yiling 布饶依灵, is a recognized Wa artist. She was considered a child-prodigy in the 1990s for her paintings of chickens and other small animals. She now devotes her talents to modernist painting that include themes of Wa life.

<sup>4</sup> A Romanized Wa script was created in 1912 as a medium for Christian religious tracts. The script was revised in 1957, and although ignored during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) it has seen limited use in transcribing folk literature and writing official documents, but has been little used for literary works (Wei 2001:112-113).

authors in China, even those such as Yi poet Aku Wuwu 阿库乌雾 (Luo Qingchun 罗庆春), who write in both their 'native tongues' and Chinese (Bender 2009:123-124). As is usual with names of minority Sinophone writers (or other non-Chinese names), Burao's name has been Sinicized by the use of Chinese characters. Thus, 'Burao Yilu' is a representation of her Wa name *Ilu Buraog*'.<sup>5</sup> Though writing in a mainstream linguistic medium Burao consciously utilizes elements of Wa myth, ritual, and folk customs to conjure certain images of the Wa. These representations are produced and distributed within a popular social context that is saturated with images of ethnic minorities (including the Wa) in films, public art, cultural song and dance programs, ethnic minority eco-museums, ethnic minority theme parks, and ethnic tourism venues (Schein 2000:133-134; Rees 2000:147-157; Harrell 2001:11-12; Davis 2005:32-37; Notar 2006:54-59).

Burao has striven to connect with rural Wa culture in the remotest mountain areas of southwest China as part of her advocacy. Though of a different nature, she is involved in cultural brokerage between Wa and Han culture, as was her distant forbear Wu Shangxian. 'Moon Mountain' is replete with ethnographic imagery enabling engagement with perceptions of the Wa as among the most extreme of 'exotic Others'. Yet, it is in this act of engagement that Burao secures a voice for a counter-discourse, conveying the idea that the

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<sup>5</sup> Besides authors' names, a large number of terms from ethnic languages have evolved counterparts in Chinese that often appear in Sinophone writings of a given ethnic group. It is difficult to represent sounds in many languages using Chinese characters, and Wa is no exception. To partially remedy this situation, word lists and dictionaries in which conventional equivalents for Chinese characters are given in Romanized scripts or IPA symbols have been compiled for a number of languages spoken in southwest China. See Watkins (2010) for an online Wa dictionary.

Wa are misunderstood and deserving of reconsideration as sensitive inhabitants of their lightly-tread cultural territory that is now implicitly under the impact of the rapid development and cultural change affecting all cultures in southwest China.<sup>6</sup> The following paragraphs briefly examine popular representations of the Wa and Burao's use of Wa myth, ritual, and folk customs that are essential for approaching her poem 'Moon Mountain' from a culturally informed perspective.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF THE WA IN CHINA

All of the ethnic groups in China were categorized on a Marxist scale of evolutionary development in the 1950s. The Wa lifestyle was classified as 'primitive society' due to an economic base in swidden agriculture, what were determined to be matriarchal elements in the society, and the existence in certain locales of the practice of headhunting,

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<sup>6</sup> The version of 'Moon Mountain' received for this article was slightly revised by the author. In the original version published in *Ethnic Literature* in 2002, the references to headhunting were not as obvious. The line "an awe-inspiring human skull" in the present version was originally "an awe-inspiring buffalo skull" and "the fierce Awa blade used to cut heads" was rendered simply as "the fierce Awa blade." (I have translated *man* 蠻 as 'fierce'. Historically this character has also been used to represent some of the 'barbarian' tribes in southern China, suggesting a more nuanced meaning of the word in this poem.) Other small changes were also made in the wording. The changes reflect not only the mutability of 'text' in the modern Chinese context, but also suggest the masked references to headhunting as instances in which veiled messages are used by women/ minorities in specific cultural situations (Radner 1993:2-5) .

which was outlawed by 1958. As in 'Moon Mountain', Burao often utilizes poetry as a medium for subtly raising consciousness over perceptions of her people, who still suffer from stigma associated with headhunting.<sup>7</sup>

Representations of the Wa in the exhibit depicting Wa folk life and ritual in the Yunnan Provincial Ethnic Museum (Yunnan minzu bowuguan 云南民族博物馆) in Kunming give a straightforward and scientifically framed overview of aspects of traditional Wa culture (including wood drums and water buffalo skulls). Nevertheless, the practice of headhunting is still commonly associated with the Wa in China.<sup>8</sup> A website entitled 'Ethnic China' includes a

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<sup>7</sup> In a note to her present version of the poem 'Moon Mountain', Burao asserts that the Wa are among the few groups on earth to have practiced headhunting. She also states that water buffalo skulls have replaced human ones in rituals (Burao 2002:58):

The Wa are among the few headhunting groups on earth. In the past heads were taken for use as ritual offerings in celebrations held to secure bountiful harvests of grain in the coming year, and continue a cultural history that has lasted for thousands of years. In 1958, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Wa ended the headhunting tradition, and now use buffalo heads in the grain sacrifices.

<sup>8</sup> Differing from the theory that Wa headhunting was primarily linked to agricultural sacrifices, Fiskesjö (2010a:250) argues that the practice arose only in recent centuries in conflicts with outsiders from China, Burma, and England in the border regions between China and Burma. As such, it may be considered an aspect of warfare. The taking of heads in warfare has occurred in many other cultures around the world, including Europe, the Americas, and early

comprehensive section on Wa culture, including a description of a dragon propitiating rite (*jilong* 祭龙 in Chinese). As if anticipating the stereotype, wording on the site includes an often repeated line, translated here as:

After the government proscribed headhunting in 1958, the Wa employed another form of sacrificial offering in some contexts—a cow head to represent a human head (Ethnic China 2010).

Moreover, Chinese histories of the Wa often point to possible relations between the Wa of today and an ancient group dating to the Han 汉 Dynasty known as the Pu 濮 (Wei 2001:19-21). The link with the Pu, which legitimizes the Wa as a people rooted in ancient China, is mentioned on the official English language website of the People's Government of Yunnan Province. There is no mention of the former headhunting practice, though the sacrificing of buffalos in connection with the drum rituals is detailed (People's Government 2010).

## DRUMS AND GOURDS

As noted, in Chinese sources the practice of headhunting is associated with drum worship and the desire for rich harvests that were expedited by the taking of human heads. Large wood drums carved from logs are a central component in Wa ritual (Zhao 2000:1-3). The major drum ritual is held for the *moik krok* 'Life Force' residing in the large 'female' wood drum (Wei 2001:172-174). Although meanings of the drums vary among the Wa groups, the drum is often considered a representation of female genitalia or otherwise related to female fertility. In certain rituals, young women dance

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China. For an in-depth study of Wa sacrifices and headhunting see Fiskesjö (2000).

uninhibitedly before the drum as it is beaten, tossing their long hair 'wildly' up and down. In recent years this ritual has been adapted into many new contexts, including choreographed performance events at tourist venues and government-sponsored festivals (see Figure Four).

Wa creation myths tell of the re-peopling of the earth after a devastating flood destroys most living creatures. The primal myth known as *si gang lih* (*sigang li* 司岗里 in Chinese) centers on a cave (*si gang* in Wa; *lih* means 'to emerge') from which the local Wa groups and other peoples (Yi 彝, Dai 傣, and Han 汉 in some versions) emerge after the flood (Bi and Sui 2009:41).<sup>9</sup> The myth places the Wa at the center of the world—and as the first people on the land. Yet, ironically 'Moonlight Mountain' tells us that the Wa live "a life isolated, remote" from the rest of China. The flood myth and cave are referenced by the image of cutting vines, which recalls how in certain versions of the myth, a culture-hero wields a large knife to cut open a giant gourd and release the people and creatures inside. The gourd-cutting is juxtaposed with the image of hunted game being chopped up with the blade 'used to cut heads' to divide meat among the community.<sup>10</sup>

Content varies and in one version of the myth the culture-hero known as Ada Regan 阿达惹敢 makes a stone

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<sup>9</sup> Fiskesjö (2010a:241-243) discusses how the Wa self-concept of being the first people to emerge from the cave at the "center of the world" plays out in inter-state dynamics between China and Burma.

<sup>10</sup> Long, machete-type knives appear in many Wa folksongs and stories and in actual life are an important implement used for a variety of tasks in the forest. The wild game catalogued in the poem includes what is likely the Yunnan hare (*Lepus comus*) and possibly the wild buffalo or gaur (*Bos gaurus*). The 'wild fowl' could be species of jungle fowl (*Phasianinae*) related to domesticated chickens.

boat in anticipation of a great flood. When the floodwaters cover the earth, he floats about accompanied by a cow and a calabash. After some time the cow becomes famished and eats the calabash. When Ada asks where the calabash went, the teary-eyed cow says it is within her. Ada asks her to give birth to it, the cow does so, and Ada plants it.<sup>11</sup> After nine years and nine months the vines, leaves, and flowers soon cover the hillsides and valleys, but the calabash is nowhere in sight. Ada sends the cow, then an elephant, a rat, and an eagle to search for it, but all fail. Finally, after a majestic dance, a peacock succeeds in finding the gourd hidden within sacred Caimu 菜姆 Mountain. Several creatures try unsuccessfully to gnaw through the shell. Finally Ada takes action and opens the giant calabash with his knife (Wei 2001:256):

...  
Ada sharpened his great knife,  
And cut apart the calabash;  
The calabash split in two;  
Upper and lower halves,  
The upper half was the earth  
The lower half was the waters.  
The upper half was the heavens;  
The lower half was the human realm;  
In the calabash were the myriad beings;  
The myriad beings were of two types:  
In the waters were the fish and shrimp;  
On the land were the beasts;  
The Awa had two places,  
The upper and lower calabash land;  
The Awa had history,  
The upper and lower Si gang lih.

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<sup>11</sup> Ada mates with the cow to produce the calabash in some versions.

## FOLK CUSTOMS

Moon Mountain symbolizes the traditional world of the Wa, which is now under increased pressure brought about by the economic reforms that began in the late 1970s and have increased with intensity since the late 1990s. The name also resonates with the actual name 'Awa Mountains' that refers to the mountain areas of the Wa. Ancient cliff paintings in Cangyuan 沧源 County, perhaps made by antecedents of the Wa, feature images of humans hunting with crossbows, herding livestock, grinding grain, and dancing. Other images include domestic and wild animals, including buffalo, dogs, horses, deer, monkeys, tigers, and leopards (Wang 1985; Wei 2001:291-292). There are also images of the sun and moon, as well as what may be ritual specialists. In the poem, the phrase "Reaching the pinnacle of perfection" refers to the long and rich culture of the Wa that is inscribed with mineral paints on the cliff walls.

Burao's poems also strongly feature women and women's perspectives, and often draw on Wa myth and lore concerning women. In the second to last stanza the poem mentions Maiden Yena 叶娜<sup>12</sup> an important figure in Wa mythology. She is the granddaughter of the mythic matron, Yenumu 烨奴姆, associated with the custom of hair combing in courting rituals (Wei 2001:142-143; Yunnan shaoshu 2001:70).<sup>13</sup> The poem describes Yena handing a piece of white cloth to her capable and fearless lover, Aicai 岩菜,

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<sup>12</sup> Yenumu 烨奴姆 (Wa, yiaex num) is a creator figure in Wa mythology who led the first humans to wash in a river after emerging from the cave. Her granddaughter is named 'Yena' and other variations in Chinese transliteration. In Wa 'Yena' is 'yiex nab', with 'yeix' meaning 'elder sister'.

<sup>13</sup> Wa women prize their long hair and there are strong social taboos against touching the head.



onto which he spills his fresh blood as a marriage oath.<sup>14</sup> Their union begat the first generation of Wa people after emergence from the Si gang cave.<sup>15</sup> The image relates to marriage customs in some Wa areas and the figure of Yena and Acai can, on some level, represent vital young Wa adults. As in the poem, the origin myths associate women with the tending of grain. The poem also mentions the *moba* 魔吧, ritual specialists who deal with harmful ghosts and the

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<sup>14</sup> The 岩 in 'Aicai' (Wa, ai kuad) is pronounced 'yan' in Modern Standard Chinese, 'ai' in the local Yunnan dialect, and 'ai' in Wa. In certain areas, hemp cloth is placed on a fresh grave. The first insect to alight upon it is placed in a bamboo tube and taken to the home, representing the spirit of the deceased (Luo 1995:314).

<sup>15</sup> Images of Maiden Yena and Yancai resonate ironically with sub-plots in stories by Wa writer Dong Yinghui. The story 'Place of Capturing Souls' ('Shehun zhi di 摄魂之地') features a young women named Yega 叶嘎 who is the granddaughter of a great ritualist, daughter of an accomplished headhunter, and a beautiful young woman. She and her lover, Yan'ga 岩嘎, kowtow to each other in a mountain cave in a secret marriage that violates tribal taboos against unions between members of the same kinship or clan unit (Luo 1995:297-298; Fiskesjö 2009). Another story, set in the late 1940s, also includes scenes of head-hunting. Entitled 'Three Generations of Women in the Masang Tribe' ('Masang buluo de sandai nüren 马桑部落的三代女人'), one subplot involves a young woman named Nahai 娜海, who is rescued from marauding monkeys by a young shepherd named Yankuai 岩块. Though she begs to marry him, he runs off in embarrassment. She is left to starve with her abusive husband until the arrival of People's Liberation Army forces, but not before two army scouts are captured and beheaded (Gao and Shang 1999:368-370).

supernatural and kill chickens in divination rites similar to those practiced in many local cultures in the region.<sup>16</sup> Hunting is still practiced by some Wa men, who use crossbows and a variety of traps to capture their prey. (The image of crossbow darts being launched at the thatch roofs refers not to a custom, but to a random release of energy on the part of some participants at the feast.) In the latter half of the poem this traditional gender bifurcation is mentioned in the description of the old sun-burned couple. Wa folksongs emphasize gender cooperation and mutual hard work (Wei 2001:263-66).

Other items of material culture and associated customs appearing in the poem include the popular pastime of chewing betel nut (*Areca*), the making of a light beer of fermented grains (locally called *shui jiu* 水酒 'water wine' in Chinese; the Wa term is '*blai*' 'beer'), roasting meat, using crossbows, the cultivation of yams, the weaving of hemp cloth, and the use of a non-native herb, tobacco.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This discussion has examined Burao Yilu's use of myth, ritual, and folk customs in representing a gentler counter-discourse to negative perceptions of the Wa ethnic group. The final lines of the poem are a plea to reconsider the image of the Wa people in light of their sympathetic, holistic relation to the environment, rather than solely on the grounds of their historic level of economic development and unacceptable behaviors in their recent past. The poem

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<sup>16</sup> '*Moba*' is a Sinicization of '*maw pa*', a word from the language of the Lahu 拉祜 ethnic group, neighbors of the Wa in China (Walker 2003:170). The Wa term is '*ba nqai*'.

<sup>17</sup> Fiskesjö has discussed the stigmas surrounding the production and use of this homemade beer in Wa in terms of cultural insiders and outsiders (2010b:111-112).

implicitly suggests, however, that the timeless relation to the life force of nature is mitigated by blood. The recurrent imagery of spilled blood attests to this linkage: the skull that serves as icon of the relation with the life force, disarticulated bodies of prey animals that are consumed by the community; the ritual killing of chickens to carry off evil forces, the implied animal deaths in the old man's traps; and the blood-letting in the primal wedding of Yena—all concern blood as the medium of a force that generates good harvests and individual and community welfare. This subtext argues for the persistence of a Wa sensibility that will continue contiguously with efforts to present an edifying face to the outside world and reconcile the place of the Wa among the ethnic minority groups of China.

## 月亮山

围着月亮的边缘醉舞  
一定浑然又自在  
阿佤人一辈子一辈子  
收获封闭与荒凉 豁达与悠远

登峰造极的老祖先  
开创祭祀的信奉物是  
一架威严的人头骨  
这图腾  
为奔走夜路的小伙子  
翻山越岭不怕蛇毒 兽猛  
.....

阿佤人喜爱呆在  
月亮山乘凉  
用槟榔枝驱赶闷热的雨季  
狂欢的风灾

狩猎者  
将战利品野鸡 野兔 野猪 野牛  
使用族群中砍人头祭谷的大蛮刀  
分割  
发散给山寨的父老乡亲  
山里人就过上“共产主义”的生活

篝火边烧烤而食的  
阿佤人  
吃得开心时  
一刀刀割断山窝窝里的青藤子  
吃得火气来  
一弩弩刺痛山坡坡上的草棚子  
魔巴杀鸡放血忙碌着看鸡骨卦  
把山寨闹得热乎乎

团月亮 扁月亮  
老阿妈空着门牙低着头 飘飞着白发  
淘制小红米水酒  
老阿爹弓着腰干 光着干巴巴的脊梁  
摆弄捕猎器吸着草烟斗  
那黝黑皮肤的小俩口  
管不住那么多写进故乡的  
辛酸与欢乐  
爬上陡峭的石岩  
仰望三千多年历史的崖画  
探访土坎上野生成遍的山芋

晴朗的月亮山  
只有叶娜姑娘的心  
最神秘最惹人眼红  
在定亲那天  
她备下一块白色的自织麻布

让岩块哥咬破手指上染上几滴血  
示意佤族的恋情  
永不褪色

铺满银光的月亮山  
阿佤人在这块原始而肥沃的土地上  
一朝朝生栖  
一代代繁衍  
这样崇尚大自然的边地民族  
谁敢说他不夠人性

载自《民族文学》杂志 2002 年第四期

## MOON MOUNTAIN

Encircling the edge of moonlight  
a drunken dance,  
natural and unrestrained

Generation by generation,  
wresting what's offered by the bleak mountains,  
a life isolated, remote

Reaching the peak of perfection, the elders  
incited worship of their object of belief  
an awe-inspiring human skull

This totem  
erected for youths running the night trails,  
crossing the mountains unafraid  
of deadly serpents or savage beasts

The Awa people like living as they do  
there in the coolness of Moon Mountain

chewing betel nut to fend off the sultry  
monsoons,  
the frenzied winds

The hunters bear their prizes—  
wild fowl, hare, boar, and buffalo  
rending them with the fierce Awa blade  
used to cut heads as offerings for grain,  
dividing meat among all villagers, all relatives

That's the communal way  
of these mountain folk

The Awa, roasting and eating by the bonfires,  
eating with such gusto

Each cut slicing the green vines  
of their nest  
within their mountain lair

Then the dancing begins  
the unconstrained wooden drum dance

the eating  
until the internal heat rises

Crossbow darts prick the thatch roofs  
on the hillsides

a *moba* kills a chicken, draining its blood,  
reading the divination by its bones,  
as the mountain village breaks wild

a round moon, a flat moon above

An old woman missing a tooth bends her head  
white hair flying  
as she washes red grains for beer;

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an old man bends his bare back,  
smoking a pipe as he sets a trap

This sun-darkened couple  
has no say over the great joy  
and sadness  
inscribed in the village's past...

They crawl up steep precipices,  
for a look at three thousand year old cliff paintings  
to examine yams within the terraces ...

The cloudless Moon Mountain has  
only Maiden Yena's heart;  
most mysterious, most envied

On the day of their engagement  
she carried a piece of white hemp cloth,  
inviting Brother Yancai to bite his finger,  
to let those drops of blood become the Wa people's love

the color never to fade

Moon Mountain is imbued with a silver sheen  
on this ancient and fertile land  
the Awa people have lived day by day  
generation by generation

Who can say that these people,  
so in tune with nature,  
can lack human feeling?

Source: *Ethnic Literature (Minzu wenxue)* 2002(4).

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## THE FAILURE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN TIBETAN AREAS OF CHINA<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

China has undergone profound economic change and growth since economic reforms began in the late 1970s. Although associated policies provided many business opportunities in Tibetan areas of China, Tibetans remain poorly equipped to respond to and take advantage of these opportunities. The reasons for this are complex, difficult to assess, and include political, social, cultural, and environmental factors. An examination of current educational practice with a focus on vocational education in Tibetan areas of the PRC suggests that poor education is key to explaining the inability of Tibetans to compete economically with non-Tibetan migrants.

### KEY WORDS

Market participation, vocational education, Tibetans, PR China

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) initiated far-reaching economic reforms in the late 1970s, China has experienced significant economic change and growth. Associated policies have provided many business opportunities in Tibetan areas of China, particularly as a result of the Western Regions Development Program launched at the beginning of this century. Tibetans remain however, poorly equipped to respond to and benefit from such opportunities. During research across Tibetan regions of China, one problem was strikingly obvious: although Tibetans are a majority in most Tibetan areas, Tibetan owned businesses comprise only about twenty per cent of the total. This figure emphasizes the difficulties faced by the Tibetan community, and highlights the extent of serious competition in seeking employment in Tibetan home areas.

Studies of Tibetan employment obstacles have resulted in varied perspectives and causes. Both Chinese and foreign scholars have recognized that Tibetans are generally unable to compete with non-Tibetan migrant laborers. For example, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences undertook a detailed study of economic and social development in Tibetan areas of China in 2003 through examining small businesses and found that eighty per cent of private businesses were owned by non-Tibetans migrants (Wang and Zhu 2005:11). Goldstein and others conducted a study of life in rural Tibet from 1997 to 2000 and concluded:

Villagers and many of their leaders are frustrated by the dearth of job opportunities in construction projects, blaming this not on the lack of economic investment in Tibet but rather on the unrestricted influx of non-Tibetan migrant laborers.

They further observed that non-farm work is crucial for Tibetan rural households, given increasing population and decreasing land per capita. However, villagers and their

leaders almost universally noted a lack of available jobs, and most of those who do find employment only receive poorly-paying jobs because of their low skill levels. The difference in pay scales between low-skilled manual labor and skilled labor is substantial; skilled laborers earn 65-100 per cent more than their unskilled counterparts (Goldstein et al. 2003:777).

The causes that obstruct people, particularly the poor, from effective market participation are complex and difficult to assess. To understand why Tibetans are unable to participate effectively in the market and, in particular, to better understand why only a limited number of Tibetans are able to operate their own businesses, an understanding of Tibetan culture, society, social practices, and norms is paramount. The Buddhist foundation of Tibetan society explains in part why it is difficult to apply a 'rational' choice theory derived from self-interested individualist prototypes of Western society that many social scientists assume to be a universal. To have valid answers to the question of lack of Tibetan participation in the market, it is crucial to better comprehend the history and culture of Tibetan society and how this applies to the values and attitudes of Tibetans toward business. More importantly, it is also essential to understand the applied policies of government as practiced. Education is another crucial factor in explaining why Tibetans compete poorly with non-Tibetan migrants in the market.

Recent studies on China's western regions have shown the critical role of education in economic and social development. For example, both Yang (2005) and Chen (2006) conducted studies on human resources in China's western regions, which include all Tibetan areas of China. Although they explored this issue from different perspectives, each concluded that the development of human resources is key in promoting sustainable economic development and social cohesion. In addition, because sixty to eighty percent of Tibetan areas are ecologically fragile, a non-resource-based approach should be adopted in developing Tibet (Ng

and Zhou 2004:554), reinforcing the essential role of education in economic development.

The nature of vocational education means that it directly impacts people's market participation; it is crucial in forming and providing skills needed for individuals to be able to compete for and obtain jobs. For these reasons, this study focuses on vocational education. It starts with a brief review of the current state of vocational education in Tibetan areas of China and focuses particularly on the existing problem of vocational and business training programs. The conclusion is that it is essential to develop vigorous vocational and business education to assist Tibetans participation in the market.

## CURRENT VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Vocational education in China is integrated with the general education system, unlike in most other countries. After completing nine years of compulsory education (six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school), students may pursue one of two educational tracks: they may continue with general education, thus continuing to senior secondary school and possibly, college or university. Alternatively, they may choose to follow the vocational educational track, thus continuing to secondary vocational schools and then possibly college or university.

In Tibetan areas, there are relatively few well-established and effective vocational training programs. Such programs are usually provided by specialized secondary (*zhongzhuan*) schools that are general diploma education institutes offering such subjects as healthcare, teaching, translation, veterinary skills, finance and accounting, secretarial skills, and agricultural skills. The standard curriculum for specialized secondary schools is common across China, taking three to four years to complete. Such subjects as political theory and Chinese literature are part of the core curriculum.

Most vocational training schools and centers are attached to Tibetan middle schools, such as Hongyuan Tibetan Middle School in Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province and Rebgong Tibetan Middle School in Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. Although vocational training schools have a connection with middle schools, they lack necessary facilities and properly trained teachers to provide effective vocational training. Usually, they offer vocational training as elective courses, in addition to normal courses in the secondary school curricula. Classes include Tibetan painting, household appliance repair, computer skills, tourism, motorcycle and automobile repair, and agriculture and construction skills. Teachers are invited, as needed, for relatively short periods of time. However, such teachers often lack teaching experience or training; instead they only have certain skills and knowledge in the subject gained through work experience.

There are also short-term vocational training programs provided by government departments, for example, the Employment Bureau, targeting laid-off employees of former state owned enterprises (SOEs). Such trainings are run two to three times a year. In certain areas, the government department must fulfill a quota of trainees. However, due to limited funds, such trainings are not always conducted.

Most Tibetan autonomous prefectures only have two specialized secondary schools, namely those focusing on teacher training and healthcare. Historically, an acute shortage of teachers had led to teacher training dominating specialized secondary education. However, due to new standards set by the central government for higher teacher qualifications in the late 1990s, teacher training schools stopped recruiting students. For example, all teacher training schools in Qinghai were ordered to stop recruiting students after 2005. Consequently, most teacher training schools were renamed either general senior secondary schools or vocational training schools. Such schools may be qualified to



offer general senior secondary school programs, but cannot provide sound vocational training programs because they lack relevant trainers. For example, Huangnan Teacher Training School was renamed Huangnan Vocational School in 2003 so that it could include vocational training. Despite its title, the school lacks resources to run effective vocational training programs, making it no different from regular schools that recruit students for senior secondary school education. The local government then designated the former healthcare school a vocational school. But again, without qualified teachers and resources for vocational training, effective vocational training programs cannot be offered. Although the importance of vocational training is vigorously promoted and emphasized in government documents and in the media, there is no single effective vocational training school in Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

A similar situation applies to most other Tibetan autonomous prefectures. For example, in 2002, Yushu Medical School and the Nationality Normal School combined to form the prefecture's only vocational school. Currently, the school has seventy teachers, most of whom are from formal teacher training and medical schools. The school provides training in driving, tailoring, cooking, computer skills, rural medicine, and translation, through evening schools and short-term programs. Currently, 200 students study medicine, forty study computer skills, and forty study English. Students are recruited based on their *zhongzhuan* provincial standard examination scores and ninety percent are Tibetan. Lacking qualified teachers, the school is unable to provide other locally needed vocational training programs.

Vocational training in Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province is another example. It began in 1984 with the founding of Hezuo Vocational Middle School. At present, there are five vocational schools and two vocational training centers in Gannan Prefecture, which have faced difficulties in recruiting students because:

- Since 1995, the government has stopped assigning jobs to vocational school graduates.
- After completing a middle school education, students prefer general senior secondary schools to vocational schools.

These factors mean that most vocational schools no longer provide vocational training programs; they only provide standard senior secondary school education. Gannan Tibetan Vocational School is now the only institution that continues to recruit students for vocational training in Gannan Prefecture. Established in 1972, the school was originally named Gannan Nationalities School and initially trained teachers to serve in primary and secondary schools throughout the prefecture. It was renamed in 1999 for the purpose of developing and promoting vocational education.

It has three training program courses. One is at the *zhongzhuan* level, offering graduates the *zhongzhuan* diploma issued by the government. Currently, the school offers three-year training courses in tourism and computer skills. Another track is the "3+2 higher vocational training program" that combines three years of senior secondary school first with another two years of training in vocational skills. Upon graduation, students receive a college diploma. To run the "3+2 program," the school must obtain approval from a relevant college and offer the program jointly with the college. The third program offered is general vocational training, providing graduates with a certificate issued by the school. Currently, there are forty students enrolled in driving, twenty in sewing, and another twenty in household electrical appliance repair. However, like other vocational training schools, they lack qualified teachers and find it difficult to recruit students.

The situation of vocational education in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) differs slightly, mainly because the government is better equipped financially to implement

policies of developing secondary vocational education and constructing key vocational schools. The government has earmarked ten million RMB annually for vocational education and has either halved or waived tuition fees for children of farmers and herdsmen as well as workers in dire straits.

In terms of special policies, the government actively encourages vocational schools to adapt their curriculum to market needs. It permits excellent graduates of secondary vocational schools to continue study at higher vocational education in colleges and universities without having to sit for examinations. Furthermore, it encourages the development of vocational education in technical skills, including training for farmers and herdsmen, and also encourages in-service teachers to advance their degrees and professional skills through further study.

The main measures implemented are:

- Adjusting the distribution of vocational education and optimizing educational resources. Since 1998, the distribution and structure of vocational schools in the whole region has been adjusted according to the industrial structure of the TAR and local population density. Former schools with a single major have been restructured into comprehensive vocational schools. In total, three secondary vocational schools have been closed while three have been incorporated. Five have been restructured. These measures have reduced the number of vocational schools from sixteen to eleven. Currently, each of the six prefectures, except Ngari Prefecture, has a comprehensive vocational school.
- Improving the hierarchical structure of vocational education. By doing this, the government hopes to increase the options and channels to further education for graduates of vocational schools.

- Targeting agricultural and pastoral areas. The government hopes to develop technical skills in primary and secondary schools in agricultural and nomad areas by introducing a new set of technical skills, such as agriculture, livestock breeding, sewing, carpentry, drawing, and weaving.
- Adjusting the courses offered at vocational schools to fit market demands. Vocational schools should develop new majors that meet the demands of leading industries.
- Improving the quality of teaching in vocational education. By encouraging in-service teachers to attend teaching methodology courses and gaining further qualifications in vocational teaching, the government hopes to increase the number and quality of vocational teaching staff in the region.

Nonetheless, even though the government has given much support to vocational education, the reality is that vocational training programs remain at a difficult stage. In order to understand these challenges, we examine the Vocational and Technical School of Nagchu Prefecture, the only vocational school in the prefecture. Until 1997, the school was known as the Nagchu Prefecture Normal School. Among the TAR *zhongzhuan* schools, this was the first to become a vocational and technical school. At present, the school has an enrollment of around 300 students and a faculty of twenty-one.

The school offers courses in animal husbandry, rural veterinarian skills, secretarial skills, computer skills, and machine maintenance and repair, in addition to other such short-term courses as railway mechanical operation, cooking, and accounting. In recent years, laboratories, practical training centers, and specimen classrooms have been built. However, the school stills lacks a faculty of properly trained vocational trainers.

In March 2002, the school held an eight-month training program supported by the Tibet Poverty Alleviation Fund (TPAF), an international NGO based in Lhasa, attended by forty-five male students from the seven counties in the prefecture. Most trainees had received a few years of primary education. The project aimed to increase local income by providing more employment opportunities to local Tibetans through construction and building projects.

The course encountered difficulty in finding qualified trainers who had both practical experience and Tibetan language ability. Finally, a Han Chinese trainer conducted the courses and a Tibetan teacher interpreted. The quality of training was below average because the Han Chinese trainer was not properly trained. Though skilled in carpentry and painting, he was unable to convey content and produce detailed training syllabi and plans.

There are a few effective vocational training programs in this dim picture of vocational education. The Sichuan Tibetan Institute (STI) is one. Established in 1981, it is directly under the jurisdiction of the Sichuan Province Ethnic Affairs Commission. It is located at the prefecture seat of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. In 1982, the school began recruiting Tibetan students from Ganzi, Aba, and Liangshan prefectures in Sichuan Province. Students are recruited based on their scores on the provincial senior secondary school examination. Currently, the school has thirty-eight teachers and 518 students of which ninety percent are farmer's and herdsman's children. The school offers courses in tourism, Chinese-Tibetan translation, secretarial skills, traditional art, Tibetan medicine, Tibetan literature, Tibetan Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. Political theory, Chinese, and computer skills are taught in Chinese while all other subjects are taught in Tibetan.

According to the school headmaster, the school's mission is to preserve and promote traditional Tibetan culture, which is its biggest advantage with regard to student recruitment and employment opportunities as compared to

other schools in Ganzi. The school has adjusted the set-up of its program and increased the number of teachers in time to seize new opportunities in the job market: the tourism industry is rapidly growing in Tibetan areas, yet tour guides proficient in Tibetan and Chinese are lacking and Tibetan tourist products are insufficient; construction in Tibetan areas is quickly expanding, yet qualified personnel are still needed in the building, decoration, and design of Tibetan houses; and healthcare standards are low in pastoral areas, yet the number of Tibetan doctors is insufficient.

Government officials and local people throughout Ganzi Prefecture praise both the competency of graduates and the high quality of education provided by the school. The school headmaster and teachers believe the reason for such praise is that the graduates' employment rate is high. For example, sixty percent of the graduating class of 2002 found employment immediately after graduation, which has made parents feel that their educational investments are rewarded. For other graduates in 2002, they either went home to assist local farmers and herdsman by using skills learnt in school or moved to towns to find jobs. Because of their high level of education and skills, these graduates usually eventually become self-supporting.

Plans to develop the school include increasing the quality of education and offering higher degrees through cooperation with other colleges and universities such as:

- to jointly teach college-level Tibetan language classes with Southwest Nationalities University (Chengdu);
- to hold college-level Tibetan medicine classes in cooperation with Qinghai Tibetan Medical College (Xining);
- to run classes in teacher-training in both Chinese and Tibetan with Northwest Normal University (Lanzhou); and

- to jointly hold classes in traditional art with Qinghai Nationalities Teacher's College, Qinghai Normal University (Xining).

However, the school faces many difficulties in recruiting students and adjusting to market demands, including offering other needed vocational training programs.

## CHALLENGES FACING VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMS

Policies related to employment options as well as educational structure, translate into vocational training programs facing numerous problems. As mentioned, policy on educational structure merges various specialized schools. For example, Aba Industry School, Aba Finance and Trade School, and Aba Agriculture and Animal Husbandry School merged to become the Aba Vocational School. Another policy changed specialized schools into senior secondary schools teaching the standard senior secondary school curriculum. For example, Ma'erkang Normal School has been changed into Aba Nationalities Senior Secondary School. The drawback to such actions is that the newly formed schools are neither effectively supported nor sufficiently equipped to provide high quality vocational training, and so they fail to attract students. These programs depend on tuition to meet part of their operating revenue; a decreased student enrolment leads to decreased operating funds. Furthermore, Tibetan areas struggle to complete the government mandate for compulsory six- and nine-year education. As such, government spending in vocational education is limited because funds are lacking. This combination of factors binds vocational training programs and causes them to run on extremely limited budgets. For example, according to information provided by the Aba Education Bureau, it has an annual budget of only 100,000 RMB to plan for vocational training—this in a prefecture with

thirteen counties—which is far from adequate to build a quality vocational training program.

Lack of funds is related to a host of problems. Vocational training programs lack access to qualified teachers because most programs do not offer salaried positions to qualified individuals. Compounding the problem, the programs cannot afford to send their existing teachers to inland training schools to receive specialized training in relevant courses. As such, the programs have teachers with out-dated teaching methods, who are not practitioners or skilled in the areas they should teach. Additionally, schools lack the authority to replace unqualified teachers who retain their position until they retire. Therefore, the schools can only wait until a position becomes available to hire a qualified teacher.

Furthermore, existing vocational training programs cannot afford to build necessary facilities. This is apparent in the lack of practice-based and experimental facilities. For example, Yushu Vocational School has only two practice cars for eight terms of driving classes and forty computers for 280 students. There is no kitchen where budding chefs can practice cooking. Students are confined to reading lessons and unable to gain necessary practical skills, an essential component of vocational training.

Teaching materials are inadequate because they have not been specially developed to be relevant to local areas; they were originally developed in other parts of China. There is no further incentive to create or adapt proper teaching materials, either at government or institutional level, partly due to a lack of effective educational policy and partly because there is no relevant authority or expertise at the local level able to do so. This deficiency of direction and expertise extends to vocational training program curricula. At present, efforts have not been made to formulate sound curricula that are individually relevant to respective skills.

Another major problem with current vocational training programs is inadequate support in preparing students for graduation, i.e., there is no job placement service that



grooms students in interview skills, résumé writing, or networking. Vocational schools are thus unable to connect graduates to relevant industries.

Furthermore, although the government emphasizes the importance of vocational education, it is considered a second-class education. General secondary education remains the priority for both education administrators and parents. Vocational education is seen as fitting for those who fail to pursue an academic education. For many students and their parents, the only purpose for secondary school education is to prepare for and pass national entrance exams and enter a university. More importantly, for many education administrators, the indicator for the quality of education is the number of students who pass national entrance exams and has nothing to do with vocational education.

It must be said, however, that people's attitude is changing due to increasing difficulties in finding jobs with a college degree. Relevant vocational training programs can find a clientele. For example, in spring 2006, the Education Bureau of Huangnan Prefecture supported a training program on shoe repair and polishing, and selected ten young Tibetans from impoverished farming households. After the training, they provided basic facilities and equipment to the trainees who subsequently had little difficulty in finding customers, since previously Tibetans were not involved in such work (Zhejiang and Sichuan natives dominate). After some time, they discovered that they could make much more money than anticipated and continued their work. With some work experience and funding, they may begin their own small businesses in the future.

Another example is automobile repair training provided by Ban'ge Vocational Training Center, Ban'ge County, Nagchu Prefecture, TAR. In summer of 2003, the vocational training center started training classes in automotive repair for local Tibetans. Due to difficulty in finding qualified trainers, the center hired an experienced Tibetan driver to teach. Seven recently graduated trainees have opened car repair shops in the county seat, most of

which are successful businesses. At present, other than one Chinese-owned car repair shop, Tibetans own all other car repair shops.

## BUSINESS TRAINING PROGRAMS

Business training is important because it directly affects people's market participation. As Guy Pfeffermann (2005) argues, a well-designed business education contributes not only to individual achievement but also to high societal aspirations. Businesses generate jobs, incomes, taxes, and technological innovation; economic and social development can hardly be achieved without dynamic firms. Business education thus plays a vital role in bringing people out of poverty by equipping them with necessary skills and knowledge to effectively participate in the market.

Business education can play a vital role in promoting Tibetans' participation in business, especially when combined with training that helps the development of individual models of enterprise-oriented thinking and behavior promoting entrepreneurship.

Business education and training is least developed in Tibetan areas of China. By transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy, China has witnessed a rapid growth in marketing and business education since the mid-1980s. Alon and Lu (2005) observed that in 1979 only one university in Shanghai enrolled a few dozen economic students and offered only three economics courses. Dramatic change has occurred; eighteen percent of China's university students took business courses in 2001. However, because of the poor quality of education and the language barrier, few Tibetans can access such improvement in business education.

Currently, only the School of Economics and Management of Tibet University and the Department of Tibetan Literature, Northwest Nationalities University offer business courses specifically targeting Tibetan students. In the School of Economics and Management, business courses

are offered by the Department of Economics and the Department of Industry and Commerce. Both were established in 2003. Currently the School of Economics and Management has fourteen Tibetan and twenty-two Han Chinese teachers. A total of 782 students are in this school, but only half are Tibetan, the other half is Han Chinese. Tibetans account for ninety-two percent of the TAR population. Thus it is not convincing that this school aims to train Tibetans. Additionally, all textbooks are in Chinese.

The Department of Tibetan Literature of Northwest Nationalities University is the only institute providing business courses solely to Tibetans. It began offering a BA business program to Tibetans in 2000 and is the first program providing a business management major to Tibetan students. Currently the program has 120 students from all Tibetan areas. Besides meeting the requirements of national entrance examinations, students must demonstrate strength in the Tibetan language, ensuring nearly all students are Tibetan. Non-Tibetan students, such as students classified as Tu from Huangnan fluent in Tibetan are equipped to better serve Tibetan communities, particularly in comparison to non-Tibetans from inland China who have little knowledge of local Tibetan realities. An international NGO has supported the translation of twelve business-related textbooks into Tibetan. However, this program has only four teachers. Two are former Tibetan literature teachers and received one to two years' training in business courses in an inland university. Another two were recruited from the first class of graduates in 2004. A challenge facing this program is to identify and hire qualified teachers given the fact that few Tibetans have received business course training.

Starting this century, several international NGOs have begun to pay increased attention to business training for Tibetans by supporting training programs with cooperating relevant local institutes. For example, international NGOs supported several business management-training programs in Chengdu, Xining, and Lhasa. However, they are unable to support a systemic training program.

## CONCLUSION

During my research I observed that Tibetan small businesses tend to be concentrated in the sectors that rely on marketing and selling Tibetan goods and cultural items including handicrafts, ornaments, and Tibetan medicine; Tibetan restaurants, bars, and Tibetan-style hotels are also included. However, Tibetans are rarely involved in businesses requiring specific skills, or significant levels of investment, such as hair salons, photocopy and print shops, computer repair shops, photography studios, Western-style clothes shops, electrical appliance sales and repair shops, and automobile sale and repair shops. These services are dominated by Han Chinese and, in some areas, Hui (Chinese Muslims). For example, during fieldwork in Huangnan Prefecture in the summer of 2006, I counted 326 shops along several busy streets in the prefecture capital. Even though Tibetans are the majority population, Tibetans owned only 103 shops, accounting for thirty-two percent of the total. More strikingly, the thirty-four repair shops were solely owned by Han Chinese.

It is obvious that Tibetans find it difficult to involve themselves in skill-oriented markets, concentrating instead on certain limited areas. The reasons for this are clearly complex. However, to some extent, poor vocational education is one factor.

Additionally, there has been noticeable progress in educational development in Tibetan areas since 1978. A modern educational system from primary school to higher education is in place. However, a large gap exists between the educational attainments of Tibetans and Han Chinese, and even between Tibetans and other ethnic minorities. For example, in 1990, less than twenty per cent of TAR Tibetans had a primary school education (Postiglione et al., 2006). Although this figure had increased to 42.3 per cent by 2005, the illiteracy rate in the TAR was 44.84 per cent in the same year, the highest among the western provinces and regions and far higher than the national illiteracy rate of 11.04 per

cent. In terms of the secondary educational level, the failure is astonishing. By 2005, at the national level, 38.3 per cent of PRC citizens had a junior secondary education and 12.4 per cent had a senior secondary education, while in the TAR these numbers were 8.4 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively, the lowest educational level in all of China (NBS 2006:112–14). At the same time, few educated Tibetans are in the labor force.

About half of Tibetans who do receive secondary education cannot continue with higher education because of the limited number of seats in colleges and senior secondary schools, and especially because of financial hardships. A limited number of junior secondary students enter senior level and a limited number of senior secondary graduates enter colleges and universities. Most who cannot enter higher levels return to their villages and contribute little to the economic productivity of the Tibetan community. In Tibetan areas, as elsewhere in China, education has focused on preparing students to take examinations for higher education and neglected the development of practical skills. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy has increased the competitiveness of the job market and the poor economic situation in Tibetan areas of China has not created sufficient job opportunities for graduates. The language barrier—since Chinese is the official language and many Tibetan students never master it—and the general poor quality of Tibetan education, are additional reasons why Tibetans cannot compete with non-Tibetan migrants.

The extremely low enrollment in secondary schools affects Tibetans' market participation and the lack of vocational training program exacerbates this. Low enrollment means that few people receive secondary education. But because of the poor quality, those who do receive secondary education are unable to compete with non-Tibetan graduates. More importantly, poor vocational education does not prepare Tibetans with needed skills, thereby putting Tibetans in a difficult situation in a highly competitive market. Promoting Tibetan market participation

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requires improving the quality of education and developing vigorous vocational and business education.

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## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Aba Agriculture and Animal Husbandry School, Aba  
nongmu xuexiao 阿坝农牧学校

Aba Education Bureau, Aba jiaoyuju 阿坝教育局

Aba Finance and Trade School, Aba jingmao xuexiao 阿坝  
经贸学校

Aba Industry School, Aba gongye xuexiao 阿坝工业学校

Aba Nationalities Senior Secondary School, Aba minzu  
gaozhong 阿坝民族高中

Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Aba zangzu  
qiangzu zizhi zhou 阿坝藏族羌族自治州

Aba Vocational School, Aba zhiye xuexiao 阿坝职业学校

Ban'ge County, Ban'ge xian 班戈县

Ban'ge Vocational Training Center, Ban'ge zhiye peixun  
zhongxin 班戈职业培训中心

Chengdu 成都

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Zhongguo shehui  
kexueyuan 中国社会科学院

Department of Economics, Jingji xi 经济系

Department of Industry and Commerce, Gongshang xi 工商  
系

Department of Tibetan Literature, Zang wenxue xi 藏文学系

Education Bureau of Huangnan Prefecture, Huangnan zhou  
jiaoyu ju 黄南州教育局

Gannan Nationalities School, Gannan minzu xuexiao 甘南民  
族学校

Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gannan zangzu  
zizhi zhou 甘南藏族自治州

Gansu 甘肃

Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Ganzi zangzu zizhi  
zhou 甘孜藏族自治州

Han 汉

Hezuo Vocational Middle School, Hezuo zhiye zhongxue 合  
作职业中学

Hongyuan 红原

Huangnan Teacher Training School, Huangnan shifan  
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FUEL AND SOLAR COOKER IMPACT IN YA NA  
GDUNG VILLAGE, GCAN TSHA COUNTY, MTSHO  
SNGON (QINGHAI) PROVINCE

Rdo rje don 'grub (Duoji eduanzhi 多杰端智)

ABSTRACT

Eight accounts and discussion detail challenges faced by Ya na gdung (Yanadong) Tibetan and Muslim fellow villagers in acquiring fossil fuels, related concerns, and provide historical perspective on local fuel collection. Solar cookers have alleviated certain challenges of fuel collection, reduced exposure to smoke-filled kitchens, and provided other benefits; however, solar cooking technology needs to be further developed to increase cooker portability and decrease heating time.

KEY WORDS

fuel, wood, straw, dung, coal, stove, solar cooker, fire

### Account One<sup>1</sup>

January 1975. Hrang gzhi ma (b. 1942) woke up at the rooster's first call. In keeping with her usual routine, she automatically sat up and pulled on her ragged Tibetan robe as moonlight shone through a small hole in the ceiling and the wood-framed window next to her. She folded her quilt and crawled to the edge of the bed. A single concrete step was halfway to the ground.

Frigid air struck her, sending shivers through her body. However, she was pleased to see a few twinkling stars, for they foreshadowed a good day. She poured a scoop of cold water into a nearby basin and washed her face. Making her way to the storage room, she lit an oil lamp on a big cutting board with the aid of light passing through small paper-colored squares on the window. A piece of clear plastic bag was plastered over it, which occasionally fluttered in the icy breeze.

She poured out dough she had mixed the night before in a wood bucket onto the cutting board and kneaded it, then went to the main room. Three pots sat on a single stove. The fireplace was underneath. The stove was attached to the *heedze*<sup>2</sup> on which her husband and

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<sup>1</sup> Rdo rje don 'grub (b. 1988) is a native of Ya na gdung Village. Information about the village and for the accounts was gathered through informal interviews during the summer of 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart (2008:26) write:

'Heezee' is a Tibetan word that lacks an accurate standard written form. Today, it is often written incorrectly in literary Tibetan as '*tsha thab*' that translates as 'hot stove.' This is incorrect because the *heedze* is not a hot stove, rather, it is a hollow platform made of stones with a thin layer of dry, hard earth on top. Coals and smoldering straw and grain husks are placed inside to heat it. Felt is spread atop the

five children still slept. A short wall separated the edge the stove and the *heedze*.

She pulled the ashes and unburned soot in the hearth to the open end and shoveled them into a trash container, then disposed of them in the latrine next to the gate. On her way back inside, she picked up a medium-sized handmade wood basket of dried straw and a small bundle of wood, and put them to the right of the stove. She replaced the center pot with a shallow pot for baking bread, emptied water in the right pot into the left pot, and half-filled the right pot with fresh water from the vat standing against the wood wall that stretched halfway across the room in the middle. In front was the storage room.

She put a small bunch of straw into the stove, groped for a match, found one in the dim moonlight, struck it, and lit the straw. The straw quickly caught fire, lighting the room. Now and again she fed the fire with the same amount of straw. After about fifteen minutes she stood up and pushed the middle pot lid to one side, put her palm over the pot bottom, and checked the heat. She added more straw, went to the storage room, carefully put the dough on a small cutting board, and returned to the hearth, where she placed the thin dough in the heated middle pot. Next, she returned to the storeroom to prepare more dough, and then came back to the pot to turn the bread,<sup>3</sup> not forgetting to feed the fire. She repeated this tiring task four times. Swirls of steam rose from the right pot. With a wood scoop she filled two thermoses with hot water and added more cold water to the pot. She thus had finished the first part of her day's work.

She took a bowl from the second shelf on the

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*heezee*, which is where family members sleep and important guests eat. Chinese: *kang*.

<sup>3</sup> Locally called *jara* or *sangja* (no standard written Tibetan form). The pot is heated first. When hot enough, the dough is placed inside. Dough cooked in the same way but with oil in the bottom is called *yije* (no standard written Tibetan form).

wood wall and sat by the stove before filling the bowl with just-boiled water from a thermos and put the bread she had just cooked on a wood plate. She quickly finished her breakfast of hot water and bread, sitting alone by the hearth as dancing flames provided light. The flames went out before she finished breakfast. As she put the remaining bread in a wood cabinet, a sound caught her attention. Closing the cabinet doors, she detected a second sound from the roof. It was her friends' signal. They had agreed to toss pebbles on each other's roof. She quickened her pace, wrapped a piece of bread in her scarf, picked up a rope and sharpened axe she had prepared the night before, put them over her shoulder, and walked to the gate. She noted three figures in front of her. She joined them and they set off for their next friend's home. On the way they found three of the four remaining friends from the same village sitting, waiting for them. When they reached their remaining friend's home, a woman threw a pebble onto the roof. They waited. Hearing no sound, she threw another pebble. No response. One woman groaned, "What's she doing? Is she up?" No reply. Everyone was anxious. One woman quietly approached the wood door, peeked through a crack, and saw a dim light. This calmed her only a bit. She reported this information to the group.

One woman hopefully suggested, "I think she'll come soon. Let's wait a bit longer." Everyone agreed. However, still no approaching sounds came. They were anxious to set off, but knew they could not for they had promised the day before that the earliest one would call the next one, and so on, and they would not leave until they had all gathered. Breaking such a promise might bring bad luck. It was hard to know what to do next.

Silent and at a loss, they heard a baby's cry. It was their friend's child. This worried them for it meant their friend could not join them until the baby went back to sleep. They couldn't throw more pebbles, and she couldn't make a sound. They understood each other.

Their friend's door soon abruptly creaked open.

The young mother appeared. Cautiously pulling the door behind her, she trotted towards them.

“Why were you late?” demanded one friend.

“I heard you, but how could I reply? I was nursing my baby,” she said guiltily. Then they marched toward the fuel site, speaking only occasionally and in whispers, not wanting to disturb wandering dogs that might attack.

It was a long, hard, nine-kilometer journey. They crossed four villages and then walked through a long valley. They were silent while in the villages, fearing stray dogs would hear. As soon as they were beyond the last village, energetic conversation burst forth nonstop as if they intended to wake up the world. The sound of their voices matched the rhythmic splashing of flowing water nearby.

They were all married and each had several children. They were also close friends and some were related, making the bonds even closer. They ranged in age from thirty to thirty-five. They reached the fuel site as dawn was about to break. It had taken them four hours to arrive.

As if instructed beforehand, each quickly began cutting bushes with their axes. Halfway through, snow began falling and gradually grew heavier. It was freezing cold. It became dangerously slippery and soon everything was covered with snow. They wanted to stop and go home, but could not. They were determined to return with the usual weight on their backs. They had made a long journey and going back with little fuel was a waste of time and effort. They continued cutting wood greedily, hoping the snow would stop. It did not.

There was no shelter and they had brought only ropes, axes, and provisions. Whatever they brought had to be hauled back along with the wood.

They removed their cotton-lined black shoes, because the soles were smooth and made footing unstable. Their feet were numb, but they made good progress. Without resting or a word to each other, they cut a huge pile of wood and began to tie it into bundles. Mtsho mo rgyal finished first and shouted, “Hey, I have seven bundles.



Are you finished? If not, one of you can have my remaining bundle.” She looked around and saw everybody had six to seven bundles, except for Sgrol mtsho, who had only five. Mtsho mo rgyal kindly tied the bundle and offered it to her.

Sgrol mtsho accepted it with a smile of thankfulness and added it to her bundles. They did not have their usual simple meal of bread and water to restore their energy. Instead they laid out their ropes, placed the tied bundles atop, and bound the ropes around the bundles, squatted in front of the wood, held the rope in their hands firmly, stood up, and balanced themselves.

The trip back to the village was hard. Each woman had six or seven bundles of wood that weighed about fifty kilograms, which was nearly the same as Hrang gzhi ma's body weight. Aware that talking consumed energy, they said little, except when they stopped to rest. They got home about five hours later.

Hrang gzhi ma was exhausted. Releasing her ropes, the wood fell to the ground, scattering snow. Droplets of sweat shone on her tanned forehead despite the cold as she stretched her back, and took a deep breath. She brushed away the sweat with stiff hands. The work was still unfinished. She stared at the stacked family wood supply in front of her, taller than she was. A quick satisfied smile surfaced on her tired face. Carefully, but energetically, she threw the bundles of wood she had collected that day on top of them, making the pile even taller.

## SOLAR COOKERS IN YA NA GDUNG VILLAGE

Ya na gdung Village, Snang ra Township, Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai Province) is six kilometers south of the county seat, situated at the foot of a mountain range and on the banks of the Yellow River. It has a total of seventy-two households, of which twelve are Hui and the remainder are Tibetan. The Tibetan and Hui villagers have a close relationship despite

religious differences. This agricultural community mainly cultivates wheat, the source of staple food (noodles and bread). Its mild climate enables villagers to cultivate chili, cabbage, turnips, beans, peas, carrots, corn, chives, green onions, garlic, potatoes, tomatoes, radishes, apples, pears, peaches, apricots, watermelons, and grapes that are secondary sources of income. Villagers also work at town and city construction sites and collect and sell medicinal herbs to generate income, leaving their children in the care of their grandparents.

In about 2000, almost every household owned a mule and a donkey that were used to plow fields and transport agricultural goods. However, owing to increased income, tractors have replaced mules and donkeys. The absence of mules and donkeys has also meant the dung they produced can no longer be collected for fuel use.

Almost every Tibetan family raises at least one pig that is butchered in late autumn to provide food for winter. Some families raise two pigs and sell one to buy chemical fertilizer, pesticide, detergent, salt, tea, sugar, coal, cloth, clothes, shoes, liquor and beer, and so on.

A six-year local primary school is three kilometers away in Tshag rgyal Village, where children from ten surrounding villages study. After graduating, students may attend either of two six-year nationalities middle schools in Gcan tsha County Town—Mar khu thang.

About ten years ago, the village was ordered to stop collecting firewood from the mountain forest mentioned in Account One. This has encouraged families to plant trees that can be easily watered. The land the trees were planted on can later be claimed by the planters. In late autumn, a family cuts branches from their trees, which are now a major fuel source. The number of trees an individual household has varies from hundreds to none. Families with trees generally do not collect dung for fuel in the grasslands of Gcan tsha thang Township, Gcan tsha County, Rma lho Prefecture, which is about twenty kilometers away. Villagers who do go, use a tractor pulling a trailer, which they fill with dung and

then return home.

In summer, families burn wheat straw produced from the harvest, saving wood for winter. The amount a family collects depends on the amount of cultivated land they own.

Coal began to be used in the late 1980s. For years, poverty meant only a few better-off families bought it. Those who could afford coal soon bought metal stoves, which are more efficient in burning coal and are more convenient than the traditional stoves. Coal prices have risen dramatically and in 2009, a ton of coal cost 450 RMB. Villagers buy coal that comes from Datong Hui and Tu Autonomous County, Ziling (Xining City), Qinghai Province in the county town from Chinese, Muslims, and Tibetan retailers and transport it by tractor-trailer back home.

The traditional adobe stove remains prevalent because of the availability of straw and continuing access to wood. The stove accommodates two to three pots (not kettles) that are used to boil water. Kettles are never used, except during the New Year period. An electric bellows is now used by most households to increase cooking temperature.

When mules and donkeys were common, a small portion of the straw produced from the wheat harvest fed them. However, as livestock have nearly disappeared in the village, nearly all straw is now burned for cooking. Certain families also sell straw to nomads. A pile of straw from two *mu* (0.133 hectares) of land can be sold for about 200 RMB. Because of the few livestock in the village, local collection of dung has nearly ceased, other than the collection in the herding area just mentioned. Straw burns easily, but only for a short time and must be constantly added. Wood burns for a longer time and does not need to be constantly added to the fire.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A rare example of an 'outside' fuel source involved the renovation of Ya na gdung Temple in early 2010, producing a large quantity of wood chips and shavings. The village leader called a meeting at the temple to discuss how shavings and chips should be divided among village households. At

In 2010, no village household used bottled gas for cooking and heating water. A few households very occasionally used electric cookers for the same purpose.

The first solar cooker in the village arrived in 1996, which a family bought for 270 RMB. A parabolic solar cooker,<sup>5</sup> it was designed and manufactured by Muslims in Hualong Hui Autonomous County, Haidong Region, Mtsho sngon Province. The family used it for about ten years before it was no longer usable.

A study of solar cookers by Cheng (2009) identified various types used in China including cast iron solar cookers, complex magnesium solar cookers, glass fiber strengthened solar cookers, concrete solar cookers, box focusing solar cookers, Fresnel solar cookers, heat-box cookers, and indoor solar cookers. The government has periodically distributed solar cookers to villages beginning around 2005. The plaster bodies of some government-sponsored solar cookers quickly flake away from rain and sunlight stress, resulting in mirrors dropping off. Such quality issues are illustrated in the following account:

#### Account Two

Snying lo rgyal had a solar cooker provided by the local government. After about six months, mirrors glued to the surface of the body began to fall off when drops of boiling water struck them. The solar cooker body, made of plaster, also began to flake away. Before a year passed, the solar cooker was basically unusable. Such quality issues led

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least one representative from each non-Muslim family attended. After much discussion, it was decided that each family would receive a measure of wood chips and shavings weighing thirty-five to forty kilograms.

<sup>5</sup> See Figure One for an example of a parabolic cooker in Ya na gdung Village. All solar cookers in this village are of the parabolic type. Villagers are unfamiliar with any other type.

some families to sell them at around ten RMB each.

Most villagers are illiterate and village students have never had access to field courses in science or technology, consequently their understanding in these fields is limited, and translates into being easily satisfied with the current solar cooker design. In 2010, about ninety percent of village households had a solar cooker. All the cookers were parabolic and most featured a body and stand made of concrete (see Figure One). Villagers comment that drawbacks to the current design include its heaviness and mobility difficulties. An interviewee said two strong men are needed to move the solar cooker.

The solar cooker is particularly appreciated from May to late October, when heating for warmth is not required. During this period, optimal solar cooker use time may average six to eight hours daily. The exact time of use is also influenced by the amount of shade the solar cooker is subject to and cloud cover. Solar cookers have more hours of use if put on a roof or in an open area with about five meters of clearance on all sides. Rammed adobe walls that surround homes are three to four meters in height and negatively influence solar cooker use.

### Account Three

22 August 2010. Gsang bdag (b. 1947) is the head of a family of seven. He and his wife (b. 1950) are both illiterate. They care for three grandchildren. Two of his grandchildren attend the local primary school and one attends a nationalities middle school in the county town.

Gsang bdag and his family generate about 6,000-7,000 RMB annually through sale of agricultural goods and work at construction sites. The income cannot support the family. He borrows money from the bank. Yearly, he spends 1,350 RMB on three tons of coal. His family also burns straw, firewood, and dung, the latter being collected from

the grasslands of Gcan tsha thang. They use their tractor and trailer and travel with other families in a group for safety concerns. Collecting dung is difficult as it is collected from a distant area villagers are not very familiar with. Two days are spent on the trip. They go only once a year.

The smoky kitchen results in tear-filled eyes. The lungs are also negatively affected. The solar cooker is used three to six hours a day and saves between twenty and forty kilograms of fuel daily in summer, and about two bricks of coal a day in winter. The savings on coal expense is about eight RMB a day in winter. No accidents have happened with the solar cooker.

The solar cooker allows the family to heat more water compared to the time without a solar cooker. The hot water is used to shampoo, wash clothes, and mix with pig food, which results in increased weight gain.

#### Account Four

23 August 2010. Nor bud dbang Idan (b. 1973) is the head of a family of six. He dropped out of school after he finished the first year of junior middle school. He is the only literate person in his family. The only income is through selling agricultural goods. He cultivated five *mu* (0.333 hectares) of wheat, two *mu* (0.133 hectares) of rapeseed, and one *mu* (0.066 hectares) of barley in 2009. He built a house in 2009 toward which the government contributed 24,000 RMB.

He leads a simple life. He has no debt and no one owes him anything. He bought two tons of coal for 480 RMB per ton (125 bricks of coal per ton) in 2009. His family also burns straw, wood, and dung. Before receiving the current solar cooker, his family had two solar cookers in succession. Their poor design and poor quality meant they were soon not used. Their current solar cooker came from a Canada Fund sponsored project that placed about thirty-five good quality cookers in village homes in 2007.

Recipient local families each contributed fifty RMB toward the purchase price of 180 RMB.

The solar cooker is used to cook everything except steamed bread, because the pot should be heated nonstop for fifteen minutes. However, with the solar cooker, clouds prevent constant heat. As the power of sunlight varies seasonally, the amount of fuel saved by the solar cooker also varies.

The solar cooker saves a total of seventy to eighty kilograms of fuel in summer (May to October). In winter (December to late March), he estimated that one brick of coal is saved daily. No accidents related to solar cookers have happened and no difference in food cooked on a solar cooker and cooked otherwise is detectable. The solar cooker is used for a maximum of seven hours in summer and four hours per day in winter.

He suggested that if the cooker shape was more rounded and if it were portable, use of solar cookers would be easier and more efficient.

### Account Five

Rdor rje (b. 1967) is the head of a family of six that includes his father, wife, and three children. He dropped out after finishing the first year of junior middle school. Two children attend the local primary school and the oldest one attends a nationalities middle school in the county town. His family only owns 2.2 *mu* (0.146 hectares) of land, which is barely enough to support his family. A major source of income is the collection and sale of medicinal herbs in summer, which entails traveling to Yu shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in the south of the province. He also sells cabbage, which is planted on land borrowed from another family. His family burns straw, wood from his family's trees, dung (collected by four people in the herding area and hauled back with a tractor), and coal (yearly a ton), which he began to purchase in 2004.

The solar cooker saves a total of about seventy kilograms of straw in summer from May to October. Straw is the family's main summer fuel. They also use wood for winter fuel.

The solar cooker positively impacts the children's study, because they have more time to study. The oldest child (a girl) is responsible for making a fire and cooking. The other two children are in charge of bringing straw to her, cleaning the ash from the stove, and carrying it to the manure pile to be used later to fertilize their fields.

The solar cooker is used up to eight hours a day and saves the two hours a day that would be required to burn fuel to cook and heat water in summer. He cultivates poplars, because they require a relatively small amount of space. Last year he planted fifty to sixty poplars provided by the local government. The solar cooker allows them to leave home to do seasonal labor. His seventy-year-old father can adjust the solar cooker and cook for himself and his grandchildren.

He suggested a lighter and more portable cooker with wheels would be an improvement.

In Gram pa nang Village, two kilometers from Ya na gdung Village, some children were chasing each other. One tripped and the metal adjustment handle pierced one of his eyes, blinding him in that eye.

### Account Six

25 August 2010. 'Phags mo skyid is a housewife in a family of eight. She is illiterate and her husband dropped out after finishing grade four in primary school. Her family owns four *mu* (0.267 hectares) of land. Last year she made 1,000 RMB by selling turnips in the county town.

Raising four children and caring for her husband's elderly parents prevents her and her husband from leaving home to earn outside income.

'Phags mo skyid's family purchases two tons of



coal per year. They spent 960 RMB on coal purchase in 2009.

Her family bought a cow for 4,000 RMB. Raising a cow requires considerable work, but it produces milk and yogurt for self-consumption. The cow also produces one wood basket of dung daily. She collects the dung, makes it into plate-size patties, dries them in the sun, and later uses them as fuel.

Only pots are designed to fit in the traditional stove. The taste of water boiled in the kettle and in the pots is very different. Water boiled in the kettle on the solar cooker tastes better than water boiled in pots, which tastes dirty, because they cook everything in the same pot.

The solar cooker enables her to make steamed bread on sunny, cloudless days. The solar cooker also makes boiling potatoes easier than in pots on the traditional stove.

### Account Seven

27 August 2010. Hrang gzhi ma (b. 1942) lives alone. Making *jara* requires one kilogram of straw. To make baked bread<sup>6</sup> requires three kilograms of straw and husks. Straw and husks are burned to heat the pot and the lid, which are positioned facing each other. After they are heated, dough is brought and put in the pot, the lid is put atop the pot, and the pot is then covered with smoldering ash and straw for about thirty minutes.

In summer, solar cookers play an important role heating water, making bread, boiling potatoes and meat, and cooking dishes. The dishes are cooked with a small amount of meat tossed into hot oil and such vegetables as

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<sup>6</sup> *Godmoshi* (no standard written Tibetan form) is made in a pot with a thirty-centimeter diameter and eight centimeters thick. Two small handles are attached to either side of the pot.

potatoes, chilies, and cabbage are added.

### Account Eight

In the nearby Mdzo rgya Village shrine, the solar cooker, according to the caretaker, is used to melt butter for lamps and firewood is no longer required. He estimated that about three kilograms of wood are saved by the solar cooker per month, because butter lamps are lit only on eight special days per month.

### CONCLUSION

Conventional fuels in the form of wood, wheat straw, coal, dung, bushes, and stalks from corn and rapeseed have been and are essential. Their value is revealed through villagers' investment of time and effort—fuel is valued. Villagers worry if their fuel supply is sufficient and the amount and type of each of their fuels as winter nears. The amount to burn for cooking and heating is carefully calculated.

Traditional dependence on organic fuels has been challenged by government policy banning fuel collection in the mountain forest that was mentioned earlier. In response, technology has now come into play. In 2010, about seventy-five percent of village households had solar cookers. Those who lacked solar cookers spend little time in the village because they have homes in the county town where they spend most of their time.

The emotional stress, physical hardships and dangers, and expenses that are part of fuel collection, cooking, and heating for warmth are central to the lives of millions of impoverished rural inhabitants,<sup>7</sup> as Account One illustrates.

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<sup>7</sup> McCarthy (2010) reports that 800 million people in India and 653 million people in Africa depend on local fuel for cooking.

Much additional research is needed. The accounts given in this paper provide, for example, very different numbers for hours of solar cooker use and fuel-savings. This is related to such factors as the amount of time a family spends in the village, number of people in the home, ability to afford other fuels such as coal, and a lack of clarity on the part of those who provided information for the accounts. Careful research would reveal more precise answers to who use solar cookers, why, and the amount of fuel solar cooker use saves.

Every village family would like to own a solar hot water heater, however, with 2010 prices being around 1,000 RMB per unit, they are too expensive. A cheap, easily installed solar hot water heater would find wide application and further decrease use of organic fuels in villages. Similarly, no villager uses a solar oven. Baked bread is a staple food and an affordable, efficient solar oven would likely find wide usage. Further research might also produce a solar cooking device that is more portable and easier to adjust than the current heavy, parabolic cookers, and generate electricity in addition to cooking.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.oneearthdesigns.org/solsource.html> for a solar energy unit that claims to both cook and generate electricity (accessed 26 October 2010).

FIGURES<sup>9</sup>



Figure One. A solar cooker in a family courtyard.



Figure Two. Bread buns are steamed in a pot heated by burning straw.

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<sup>9</sup> All photographs were taken by Rdo rje don 'grub in Ya na gdung Village in August 2010.



Figure Three. A collection of wood shavings collected from a family's new house that was under construction



Figure Four. Kitchen ceiling and walls blackened by smoke.





Figure Five. Wheat straw in a family courtyard.



Figure Six. Bread bakes in a covered pot underneath smoldering straw and grain husks.



Figure Seven. Cow dung drying in the sun.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Phags mo skyid འཕགས་མོ་སྒྱིད།  
Angla 昂拉, Snang ra སྤང་ར།  
Cuojia 措加, Tshag rgyal ཚག་རྒྱལ།  
Datong 大通, Gser khog གསེར་ཁོག་  
Duojiueduanzhi 多杰端智, Rdo rje don 'grub རྡོ་རྗེ་དོན་འགྲུབ།  
Gsang bdag གསང་བདག་  
Haidong 海东, Mtsho shar མཚོ་ཤར།  
Hrang gzhi ma ཧྲང་གཞི་མ།  
Hualong 化隆, Hwa lung ཧྲ་ལུང་།  
Huangnan 黄南, Rma lho མ་ལྷོ།  
Huihui 回回, Hu'e hu'e ཧཱེ་ཧཱེ་  
Jianbaneng 尖八能, Gram pa nang གལ་པ་ནང་།  
Jianzha 尖扎, Gcan tsha གཙན་ཚ།  
Jianzhatan 尖扎滩, Gcan tsha thang གཙན་ཚ་ཐང་།  
kang 炕  
Maketang 马克塘, Mar khu thang མར་ཁུ་ཐང་།  
Mtsho mo rgyal མཚོ་མོ་རྒྱལ།  
mu 亩, mu'u མུ།  
Nor bu dbang ldan རོར་བུ་དབང་ལྷན།  
Qinghai 青海, Mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།  
Rdor rje རྡོར་རྗེ།  
Sgrol mtsho སྒྲོལ་མཚོ།  
Snying lo rgyal སྤིང་ལོ་རྒྱལ།  
Tu 土, Hor ཧོར།  
Xining 西宁, Zi ling ཟེ་ལིང་།  
Ya na gdung ཡ་ན་གདུང་།, Yanadong 牙那洞  
Yushu 玉树, Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།

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Zuojia 作加, Mdzo rgyal བཞོ་རྒྱལ།



"I, YA RI A BSOD, AM A DOG": THE LIFE AND MUSIC  
OF A TIBETAN MENDICANT SINGER

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ABSTRACT

The life and music of Ya ri A bsod, a Tibetan composer and singer who lived in the early twentieth century, is described. Ya ri A bsod wandered through Tibetan nomad areas where contemporary Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces meet in China. Texts and transcribed melodies of Ya ri A bsod songs are presented. These songs are contextualized in terms of their contemporary transmission, and the historical and autobiographical circumstances of their composition.

KEY WORDS

Ya ri A bsod, Tibetan folk song, A mdo, Mgo log

## INTRODUCTION

An icy wind cuts across the night-shrouded grassland but otherwise nothing moves or makes a sound. It is the middle of the night, and the two inhabitants of a tattered black yak-hair tent are both asleep. Suddenly a dog begins barking, shattering the stillness. Woken by the sound, the mistress of the tent calls to her son. "Ya ri A bsod!"<sup>1</sup> Go see what the dog is barking at. Maybe it's a thief!"

Wearily, Ya ri A bsod raises his head and peers out of the tent flap from the bundle of robes he is sleeping on. Without rising further, he sings to his mother:

<sup>1</sup>ཁྱི་རྒྱ་སྐྱ་སྒོ་ན་ཡོད་གི་  
<sup>2</sup>རྟ་རྒྱ་ལོ་པར་ན་ཡོད་གི་  
<sup>3</sup>འབྲི་མ་མོ་ཚུར་ན་ཡོད་གི་  
<sup>4</sup>དེད་མ་བྱ་བྱིམ་ན་ཡོད་གི་  
<sup>5</sup>ད་མི་ཚང་རྒྱ་ཞིག་མེད་གི་

<sup>1</sup>The dog is outside

<sup>2</sup>The horse is over there

<sup>3</sup>The female yak and the ewe are here

<sup>4</sup>Mother and son are inside

<sup>5</sup>So what is missing?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tibetan terms are written using the Wylie transliteration system (Wylie 1959). A list of Tibetan terms can be found in Appendix One.

<sup>2</sup> The Tibetan given here is oral, not literary.

<sup>3</sup> This account was collected from five separate consultants: 'Jam dbyangs, G.yang kho, Sngags chen, Bsam 'phel, and Rdo rje tshe ring. See 'Consultants' (below) for more information. Where possible, we site the source of all oral accounts.

This paper describes a collection of songs from the Tibetan singer and composer Ya ri A bsod, who lived in the early twentieth century on the grasslands where contemporary Sichuan, Qinghai, and Gansu provinces meet in Western China. Examples of song texts are given and contextualized in terms of previous studies and recordings; the songs' regional, social and historical circumstances; the life of Ya ri A bsod; singers who currently sing the songs; and genres and their salient features. These songs vividly depict early twentieth century Tibetan pastoral life—stealing horses, praising leaders, beseeching lovers—and people's thoughts and feelings about their lives.

## PREVIOUS STUDIES AND RECORDINGS

The only work dedicated to Ya ri A bsod previously produced was a cassette<sup>4</sup> with a spoken introduction of approximately thirty seconds giving biographical details on Ya ri A bsod. The remainder of the cassette contains a single song, called Ya ri A bsod's Heart Speech (*Ya ri A bsod kyi snying gtam*) sung by Rdo red (from Rma chu) in the late 1990s, accompanied by mandolin. The cassette was published by Pag mo bkra shis, a broadcaster and comedian who, at the time of publication, worked for Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio. Each side of the cassette is approximately twenty minutes long.

Two written sources about Ya ri A bsod and his songs exist (Dbang rgyal and Pad ma rdo rje 1995, Anonymous n.d.) and both are called Ya ri A bsod's Heart Speech. The biographical information in both texts is the same, and is identical to the information on the cassette. All three biographies are in literary rather than oral Tibetan. There are

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<sup>4</sup> ISBN 7-7994-0072-2. See Appendix Two for images of the cassette case.

some small differences between the texts in terms of vocabulary, but not in content. In both texts, the lyrics are identical to those of the song in the cassette, but the stanzas are ordered differently.

## LOCAL CONTEXT

The songs this study focuses on were recorded in January and February of 2007 in Dngul ra and A dban tshang townships, Rma chu County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province; A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province; and Rta bo Township, Rma chen County, Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province.<sup>5</sup> This area straddles the boundary of two ethnically Tibetan nomad grassland regions: Phyi 'brog (see Ekvall 1977)<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>5</sup> The first two authors visited these places as well as Henan Mongol Autonomous County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province; Bla brang County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province; and Hongyuan and Rnga ba counties, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. They did not locate any singers able to perform Ya ri A bsod songs in these areas. Their research trip lasted from 12 January to 14 February 2007. The first two authors conducted fifteen qualitative, semi-structured interviews with both singers and non-singers. From these interviews they gathered data about Ya ri A bsod's life and his songs. See Appendix Three for locations.

<sup>6</sup> Ekvall uses this term (which he spells Shimdrok), which literally means 'outer pastures' to refer to a specific area. However it is actually a somewhat pejorative term designating remote pastoral regions.

Mgo log<sup>7</sup> both of which lie in the cultural and linguistic Tibetan region of Amdo.

These areas are high-altitude grasslands, exceeding 3,000 meters above sea level. Horlemann (2002:243-244) describes weather conditions in Mgo log Prefecture; the other recording sites are not significantly different:

The average annual temperature is around 0°C, whereas during winter temperatures can drop to as low as -48°C. In summer, temperatures can rise to about +20°C during the day, and still fall to freezing point at night.

These areas have a rainy and sunny summer, and a snowy, windy winter. Because of the high precipitation, there are many rivers and marshes.

Local people in these areas subsist by herding sheep, yaks, and horses. They typically live in black yak-hair tents in summer and in houses during winter. Older houses are made of wood, willow, mud, dung, and stone. Modern houses are made from bricks, concrete, wood, stones, and glass. Family summer camps are typically spaced at intervals greater than 250 meters. During summer, families usually change pastures three or four times. Summer camps are generally at a higher altitude than winter camps.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the government began implementing two policies regarding herders in this region. The first was the institution of a householder responsibility system that privatized lands and herds. The second policy involves the relocation and settling of herders. The following is an account of privatization and resettlement in Rma chu

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<sup>7</sup> In the following description, we make generalizations about areas in Sichuan, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces. In the past, these regions had much in common, but now differences in administration have resulted in divergence. All dates and descriptions are approximate.



County collected from Chos sgron (b. 1988) on 29 December 2008:<sup>8</sup>

Prior to 2005, people only talked about resettlement and fencing, but nothing was done. Beginning in 2005, the government told local people to build fences for their village territory, which was done during 2005 and 2006. The government also divided the village territory among households. However, the villagers tried to delay this as long as possible, believing that livestock with limited pastures and limited access to water would not be fit and healthy.

Another policy is that each person in a family can only have twenty yaks. Consequently, many families sold many yaks. Some families tried to entrust their surplus yaks to other families who had fewer yaks than the limit allowed. Locals were upset about having to sell their herds, and said, "Before, we could move to new pastures wherever we needed. Whenever there was no more fresh grass or if there was inadequate water, we could simply move on. But after the government implemented that policy, we have no place to move to and our territory has shrunk. We are always stuck in one place and the livestock cannot graze well. We are worried that our livestock will all die and we will not be able to continue our way of life."

While implementing these privatization policies, the government built about 300 houses in the county town and made them available cheaply (for about 10,000 RMB) and encouraged nomads to resettle there. However, the nomads did not clearly understand what was happening; they gave up their pasture and traditional way of life without understanding what they were doing. Now, many more houses are being built, and many local people think that all

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<sup>8</sup> For general surveys of privatization and resettlement, see Yan et al. (2005) and Bauer (2005).

the nomads will soon be forced to leave the grassland.

Currently, people commonly have electricity in their winter houses. Electricity started to become common in these areas in 1999, although there are blackouts as often as once every two days and they may last for four or five hours. More serious outages happen two or three times a year and may last for up to twenty days. In recent years solar electricity generating panels have become more common, but only a few households have such panels at the summer camp.

About ninety percent of these places have no access to broadcast or satellite TV. However, people commonly have Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio and Chinese music radio. Many people in these areas do not understand Modern Standard Chinese<sup>9</sup> and therefore only listen to Qinghai Tibetan Broadcast Radio. A very few households or camps near the town watch broadcast TV that shows government-sponsored news and Chinese dramas.

Transport infrastructure is poorly developed, especially in summer camps that commonly feature dirt tracks for roads. Horses and yaks were used for transport when moving camps, herding livestock, going to the county town, fetching water, or looking for lost livestock before about 1988. Afterwards, tractors were increasingly used. Rough tracks were created by repeatedly taking the same route; there were few roads. In the early years of the twenty-first century, people, especially young men, began using motorcycles. Road construction, especially to county towns, township towns, and winter villages, has greatly increased since 2005. For example, the road from Mdzo dge County Town to A skyid Township Town and A skyid Village were paved in 2006-2007.

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<sup>9</sup> Modern Standard Chinese. ISO 639-3: CMN. The local population speaks A mdo Tibetan, ISO 639-3: ADX (Gordon 2005).

Commonly, people only receive medical treatment at Traditional Tibetan Medicine clinics at local monasteries. Sometimes people must pay for this medicine, sometimes they do not. The cost depends on the illness and is generally low. For example, a patient might need to pay fifteen RMB for a course of pills, which is much cheaper than in county town hospitals, where a course of pills might cost thirty or more RMB. At the monastery clinic, people may not need to pay if they cannot afford it. Monastic health clinics also provide bone setting, moxibustion, and acupuncture treatments. Again, the cost is low, negotiable, and might be waived in certain circumstances. Stomach problems and tuberculosis are common.

These factors—climate, livelihood, privatization, resettlement, electricity, mass media, transport, and health—all affect the transmission of Ya ri A bsod's songs. In order to understand how and why these songs were initially composed, we examine the social context of the times in which Ya ri A bsod composed the songs.

## RECONSTRUCTING PAST SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The last century witnessed dramatic changes in social life in A mdo pastoral areas (see for example Horlemann 2002, Manderschied 2002, and Yeh 2003). The social world Ya ri A bsod inhabited and the social world of today are vastly different. The social organization of Ya ri A bsod's time, to some extent, can be understood from ethnographic data (e.g., Ekvall 1977, 1968). Contextualizing Ya ri A bsod's songs in this way allows a clearer picture of who he was singing to and why.

The fundamental unit of social organization was the family (*khyim tshang*), consisting of an extended nuclear family: a married couple and their children, and paternal grandparents. Traditionally, the family lived together in a

single tent. Families, in turn, were organized into encampments (*ru skor*) that had between five and forty tents. Several *ru skor* combined to form a village (*sde ba*) headed by a *ngo ba* (*sde dpon*).<sup>10</sup> A higher but looser level of social organization was the tribe or clan, *tsho ba*, which typically had about half a dozen *sde ba*, and was also headed by a *ngo ba* (*tsho dpon*). Apart from local *ngo ba*, lamas, elders (*rgan bo*), communal leaders (*dpon po*), and kings (*rgyal po*) were also important. Each will now be described.

Monasteries and lamas wielded power within communities beyond the religious sphere. The important monastic center of Bla brang (now in Bla brang County) for instance, was responsible for conflict resolution and assisting in the selection of leaders (among other duties). High-ranking lamas had social influence and impact extending beyond their religious role and personal charisma.

The role of the elders (*rgan po*) and the power they wielded varied, as described by Ekvall (1977, 37):

In some tribes, the position of the chief is little more than an empty title, the real power of control and administration being entirely in the hands of the [*rgan po*]. At the other extreme are tribes in which the chief is all powerful... the [*rgan po*] is here nothing more than an advisory group, whose function is to nod assent to the orations of the chief.

*Dpon po* was a hereditary position; the eldest son usually inherited this position from his father. *Dpon po* were powerful individuals who had much property that was acquired, in part, by payments for aiding in conflict resolution. Such leaders presided over as many as 1,000 households (*stong dpon*) and 10,000 households (*khri dpon*).

*Rgyal po* translates as 'king'. Several local rulers held

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<sup>10</sup> *Mgo ba* is a generic term meaning 'head man' and *sde dpon* is the specific term referring to a village leader.

this title in the early twentieth century. Ekvall (1977) notes the existence of three such persons, but does not give details.

In summary, eastern Amdo's nomad areas contained socially stratified tribes and a constellation of leaders wielded various powers, constraining the lives of ordinary people. The extent of leaders' local influence is implied in the following oration, collected by Joseph Rock, in which a local leader declares independence from various forms of non-local authority (Rock in Kornman 1998: 78):

You cannot compare us [Mgo log] with other people. You obey the laws of strangers, the laws of the Dalai Lama, of China, and of your petty chiefs. You are afraid of everyone; to escape punishment you obey everyone... We [Mgo log], on the other hand, have obeyed none but our own laws, none but our own convictions... This is why we have ever been free as now, and are the slaves of none—neither of Bogdokhan nor of Dalai Lama. Our tribe is the most respected and mighty in Tibet, and we rightly look down with contempt on both Chinaman and Tibetan.

This statement powerfully evokes the absence of non-local authority in the region during the early twentieth century. However, far from being evidence for universal autonomy and independence among the nomads of northeast Tibet, as it is usually interpreted, this statement also testifies to the strength of local hegemonies. For an itinerant beggar such as Ya ri A bsod, who lacked social and family networks (see below), local authorities' patronage was particularly significant. In the next section, we examine Ya ri A bsod's life, and his motivations for composing songs.

## BIOGRAPHY OF YA RI A BSOD

Ya ri A bsod lived in the early twentieth century—his birth-date is unknown. His home was probably Dngul ra Village in Rma chu County.<sup>11</sup> People called him A bsod for short.

Ya ri A bsod was an only child and never knew his father. He lived with his mother and lacked other relatives to depend on. A typical nomad family had at least 200 head of livestock (sheep and yaks), as well as several horses, and a number of dogs. In contrast, Ya ri A bsod's family only owned one ewe, a dog, and a horse.

Ya ri A bsod, as an adult, was renowned for being unattractive and poorly dressed. It was often said of him, "*Blta mdog med gi* He doesn't look colorful," meaning that he was shabbily dressed and generally unattractive. He had a girlfriend at one time,<sup>12</sup> but never married. After his mother's death when he was in his late twenties or early thirties, he spent his life wandering, singing to those he met, and eventually becoming well-known locally.

Ya ri A bsod sang, often improvising new songs and in return, receiving food and lodging. He composed hundreds of songs in his lifetime. Through goading, chastisement, and parody, he encouraged compassion and kindness.

It was commonly thought that his songs foretold what would happen to those he sang about, partly owing to the seemingly automatic and extemporaneous nature of the songs. The following account demonstrates this:

Once, Ya ri A bsod was invited to Bla brang Monastery for a

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<sup>11</sup> The majority of consultants agreed on this. An alternative account provided by Dkon mchog tshe ring, places Ya ri A bsod's birth place in 'Bul Village, Mdzo dge County.

<sup>12</sup> See the song below.

ceremony and was asked to sing. Two *dge bshes*<sup>13</sup> transcribed the lyrics as A bsod sang. When he finished, one *dge bshes* asked him for a lyric he had missed. A bsod replied jokingly, "How should I know what the lyrics are? I only sang the song!"<sup>14</sup>

Because of his improvisational skills, Ya ri A bsod is often compared to the religious mendicant and composer Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol.<sup>15</sup> That they both led a mendicant life aids the comparison.

Several stories attest to the predictive powers of Ya ri A bsod's songs. For instance, a woman who worked as a servant for a wealthy family was arrogant and haughty despite her subservient position. Ya ri A bsod sang to her, criticizing her arrogance and depicted her constantly carrying a broom. Four or five years later, she had lost her position, was destitute, and was forced to work hard all the time, sweeping and carrying a broom.<sup>16</sup> On another occasion, A bsod traveled in contemporary Rma chu County and met an old woman, who, when she recognized A bsod, was frightened, and entreated, "I'll give you a pack<sup>17</sup> of butter, please don't sing for me!" Had he sung something negative, she was sure it would have come true.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Dge bshes* are monks who have obtained the highest scholastic degree in the Tibetan monastic system.

<sup>14</sup> Consultant: Rdo rje tshe ring.

<sup>15</sup> Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol was a nineteenth century yogin from Reb gong County, Rma lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. He composed hundreds of *mgur glu* 'songs of spiritual realization'. See Ricard and Wilkinson (2001) for a translation of his autobiography and Kapstein (1998) for a brief biographical account.

<sup>16</sup> Consultant: Rdo red.

<sup>17</sup> A sheep stomach full of butter.

<sup>18</sup> Consultant: Kun 'brom.

Ya ri A bsod's life was full of misery, which he at times portrayed comically. He often wandered alone, with no place to sleep and nothing to eat. On one such occasion, he was heard to sing:

<sup>1</sup> མི་རྒྱུ་རྒྱ་ནི་རྒྱ་རེད།  
<sup>2</sup> རྒྱ་བསྐྱ་གི་སྤྱི་བ་འདི་རེད།  
<sup>3</sup> མི་སྐྱ་ལྟ་འདི་ཕོ་རེད།  
<sup>4</sup> ཕོ་འདི་དོན་ལ་གཞན་རྒྱུ་ལེ་བརྒྱུ་ག

- <sup>1</sup> Wealth is something that cannot be found,  
<sup>2</sup> But in this life, we have the chance to accumulate wealth.  
<sup>3</sup> Hunger is something which cannot be satisfied,  
<sup>4</sup> But if someone feeds me, I'll follow them.<sup>19</sup>

At another time, he wandered to a tent. When the housewife gave him a pack of butter he sang:

<sup>1</sup> ཡ་ནི་སྤྱིན་ལ་དགའ་བོ།  
<sup>2</sup> རྩ་འཇམ་རྩ་ཞིག་ལ་རིག་གི།  
<sup>3</sup> སྤྱིང་མི་དགོས་སྤྱིན་པ་གཏོང་གི།

- <sup>1</sup> Aunty likes to make donations,  
<sup>2</sup> Her face is just like the Treasure God's.  
<sup>3</sup> She gives things without (me) begging.<sup>20</sup>

Despite his own poverty, Ya ri A bsod was famous for defending the poor and down-trodden. He often intervened on their behalf with various leaders, and persuasively advocated for them. Leaders often called Ya ri A bsod to entertain them, or to employ his predicative and persuasive

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<sup>19</sup> Consultant: Kun 'brom.

<sup>20</sup> Consultant: Kun 'brom.



powers for their benefit. For example, he sang to the Bzhag sdom<sup>21</sup> chieftain's wife, who had eloped, persuading her to return to her husband.<sup>22</sup>

Ya ri A bsod was also a thief and on at least one occasion, went to Rta bo Township, Rma chen County and stole dozens of horses. The horses' owners gave pursuit and shot and wounded him. A few days later, Ya ri A bsod died.<sup>23</sup> At the time of his death, Ya ri A bsod was probably in his forties.<sup>24</sup>

Having examined how and why Ya ri A bsod's songs were composed, and having previously discussed factors affecting the songs' transmission, the context of the songs' contemporary performance will be examined. Contemporary singers will be discussed first, followed by a discussion of different genres.

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<sup>21</sup> The Bzhag sdom Tribe is located in the area of contemporary Mdzo dge County. D'Ollone, who travelled through Mdzo dge in 1906, and therefore perhaps at the time when Ya ri A bsod was alive, described the local social and political structure thus (D'Ollone 1995 [1912]:240):

The confederation of Dzorgei (sic) consists of twelve tribes. The authority of the chiefs is not great; they are scarcely more than more distinguished and influential notabilities. All the heads of families take part in the general decision, such as a change of residence, or a question of war or peace; but for the rest they act in perfect liberty, starting on their raids or pillaging expeditions without consulting others.

<sup>22</sup> Consultant: O skyid.

<sup>23</sup> Consultant: Chos rgyal.

<sup>24</sup> Ya ri A bsod's death date is unclear. One consultant (Rdo rje tshe ring) believed that Ya ri A bsod died in the 1940s or early 1950s. Other consultants (e.g Tshe ring sgrol ma) believed that Ya ri A bsod died in the early twentieth century.

## PRESENT-DAY SINGERS

The singers all grew up in pastoral areas and included four men and three women. All but one were born before 1951. The oldest singer was born ca. 1920. They all grew up in pastoral areas.

Before the 1980s, formal schooling was unavailable in these areas and monasteries were few and far between.<sup>25</sup> Only the youngest consultant, born in 1976, had any formal schooling—six years of primary school. Two male consultants could recite Buddhist scriptures but were unable to read and write. The others were totally illiterate.

Pastoral life provides many opportunities to sing and practice songs. Herders sing to themselves and to other herders while herding, which allows them to memorize songs by listening and repeating them. Most singers traditionally learnt songs when they were ten to fifteen years of age. People typically begin herding when they are around eight years old. None of the singers were taught the songs. O skyid and Tshe ring sgrol ma from Mdzo dge both reported that they had heard the songs from their parents, who had heard them from Ya ri A bsod himself. None of the others learnt from family members, but from lyrics written by a literate religious practitioner, from an old reel-to-reel audio recording, and from other herders.

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<sup>25</sup> Gruschke (2001:81) reports that in

pastoral areas of A mdo, nomads were served for a long time by mobile tent camp monasteries, with many of them being turned into domiciled monastic complexes, including adobe or brick structures, not earlier than during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## CONSULTANTS

- Sbyin pa (male, b. 1947), Dngul ra Village, Rma chu County, a pastoralist who lived with his wife and two grandchildren, provided two songs, and information on Dngul ra Village (Ya ri A bsod's birth village).
- Chos rgyal (b. 1945), a herder from Rta bo Town, Rma chen County provided three songs and also told how Ya ri A bsod was shot and killed while stealing horses.
- Chos rgyal's son-in-law, Mchod rten (b. 1976), a professional singer famous for singing love songs (*la ye*) and *rdung len* (a modern musical genre, see below), provided one song and gave information about how Ya ri A bsod songs were learnt in the past from reel-to-reel tape.
- Rdo rje tshe ring (b. 1946), a pastoralist from A dban tshang Township, Rma chu County, provided one song and an alternative view on when Ya ri A bsod lived.
- Tshe ring sgrol ma (female, b. ca. 1920), a pastoralist from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County provided one song. Her mother met Ya ri A bsod.
- O skyid (b. 1949), a herder from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County, provided four songs, but was unable to provide biographical details about Ya ri A bsod.
- E kho (b. 1935), a pastoralist from A skyid Village, A skyid Township, Mdzo dge County provided three songs. Her mother met Ya ri A bsod.
- 'Jam dbyangs (male, b. ~1955), G.yang kho (female, b.

ca. 1955), Sngags chen (male, b. ~1955), Kun 'brom (female, b. ~1930), and Bsam 'phel (male, b. ~1955) all from Rma chu County, provided details of Ya ri A bsod's life.

## TRANSLATION NOTE

In the following examples, we have tried to produce translations accurately representing what was sung and to convey a sense of the poetics of Ya ri A bsod's lyrics. This proved challenging owing to the age of the singers and the resulting unclear pronunciation, mis-remembered lyrics, and occasional confusion regarding the ordering of lines and verses. Furthermore, the authors' unfamiliarity with the dialects used by the singers rendered the meaning of certain words and phrases inaccessible, despite consultation with members of those dialect communities. Closer consultation with the singers would have produced better translations. Nevertheless, presenting these unique materials with certain unclear passages and occasional awkward translations has great value.

## GENRE

This collection of fifteen songs represents five genres. The composition and performance context for each genre is given. A sample song text is provided for each genre, and musical transcription is given for four of the five songs.

### Robber Songs (*jag glu*)

The term *jag glu* is identical in both written Tibetan and oral A mdo Tibetan and literally means 'robber song'. Such songs

are composed and sung during night-time raids on livestock. If the raid goes awry, singing expresses the raiders' sorrow in an attempt to mollify the anguish felt and describe the negative situation. *Jag glu* are also sung in the hope that sympathetic parties might hear the song and come to the raider's assistance, and to bring luck.

These songs are also sung when children lose their livestock, when people are caught in storms and become wet and cold, and if livestock eat fodder saved for winter.

In the robber songs collected for this research, Ya ri A bsod sang about the situation he was in while being pursued by the owners of the horses he had just stolen. Two *jag glu* were collected. Both were sung by Chos rgyal in Rta bo Town, and relate to the same circumstance. One example is given below:

#### Example One

- <sup>1</sup>ས་སྐང་བྱག་པ་སྐྱ་འདབ་བརྒྱད།  
<sup>2</sup>ཡར་དགུང་ཕྱོན་མཚོ་མོ་ཡར་འབྱུལ།  
<sup>3</sup>སྐང་ནག་རིག་ཞོར་གྱི་མཚོ་མོ།  
<sup>4</sup>སྐང་དགྱེལ་རི་མར་གྱི་མཚོ་མོ།  
  
<sup>5</sup>ས་སྐང་ལྷང་བསང་ཆུའི་ཁ་མདོ།  
<sup>6</sup>ཁ་འབྱུལ་ལེར་རྟ་མང་དེད་དུས།  
<sup>7</sup>སྐང་དེའུ་འབྱམ་བྱག་ཆས་ཁ་མདོ།  
<sup>8</sup>ནག་གྱིག་གེར་ར་མདར་བརྒྱགས་ཐལ།  
  
<sup>9</sup>ངའི་ཞོན་པ་ནག་ཆུང་བྱ་རེད།  
<sup>10</sup>བྱ་ཟེར་བའི་རྟ་བཟིག་ཆེ་ཡོད།  
<sup>11</sup>དག་ནག་གོ་ཕྱོན་ནས་ཐོན་དུས།  
<sup>12</sup>ས་ཐག་རིང་ཤོག་སྐྱ་ལྷེ་ལྷེ་བ།

<sup>13</sup>ལམ་སྐྱོ་མ་གྱུ་གུ་རེལ་རེལ།

<sup>14</sup>ཁའི་ཉག་ག་སྒྲིག་གུ་བརྟོལ་བརྟོལ།

<sup>15</sup>དེར་བལྟས་ན་བྱ་ར་བྱ་རེད།

<sup>16</sup>ང་ཡ་རིའི་ཨ་བསོད་སྟག་རེད།

<sup>17</sup>སྟག་ཟེར་གི་བྱ་ཞིག་ཆེ་ཡོད།

<sup>18</sup>དག་ནག་གོ་སྟོན་ནས་སྟོན་དུས།

<sup>19</sup>ངས་སོ་སྐྱ་འབྲུག་སྐྱ་གཤམ་གཤམ།

<sup>20</sup>ངའི་མིག་དམར་སྟོག་དམར་འབྲུག་འབྲ།

<sup>21</sup>དེར་བལྟས་ན་སྟག་ར་སྟག་རེད།

<sup>22</sup>ངའི་ཁུར་གི་ཁ་རིང་སྟོག་རེད།

<sup>23</sup>སྟོག་ཟེར་གི་བྱ་ཞིག་ཆེ་ཡོད།

<sup>24</sup>སྟོན་སྟོན་ཟེ་སྟོན་ཁ་འགྲིག་གི

<sup>25</sup>མདའ་ལི་མ་སྟོར་འབབ་ཡེ་གི

<sup>26</sup>དེར་བལྟས་ན་སྟོག་ར་སྟོག་རེད།

<sup>1</sup>The mountain pass is an eight-petaled lotus,

<sup>2</sup>(And) the sky is a full blue lake.

<sup>3</sup>The mountain is full of yaks,

<sup>4</sup>(And at) the middle of the mountain is a lake full of butter.

<sup>5</sup>(At) the edge of Bsang Valley,<sup>26</sup>

<sup>6</sup>When the beautifully multicolored horses are driven,

<sup>7</sup>Beside the *rde'u 'bum*<sup>27</sup> on the pass,

<sup>8</sup>The pursuers appear in a dark cloud of dust.

<sup>9</sup>My mount is a small black bird,

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<sup>26</sup> The name of a river valley, whereabouts unknown.

<sup>27</sup> A pile of mostly white stones used to subdue such local evils as *gdon*—an evil spirit.

<sup>10</sup>(But) how could there be a horse like a bird?

<sup>11</sup>(When) a black<sup>28</sup> enemy arrives in front (of me),

<sup>12</sup>The land (suddenly) folds (up) like (a) grey (piece of) paper,<sup>29</sup>

<sup>13</sup>(And) the road rolls (up) like a ball of string.

<sup>14</sup>Blasting and blasting like cannons on the upper pass,

<sup>15</sup>If you look at the pursuers, they are as fast as birds.

<sup>16</sup>I, Ya ri A bsod, am a tiger,

<sup>17</sup>(But) how can there be a man like a tiger?

<sup>18</sup>(When) a black enemy appears in front (of me),

<sup>19</sup>My teeth chatter like thunderclaps,<sup>30</sup>

<sup>20</sup>(And) my eyes shine like lightning.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>21</sup>If you look at the pursuers, they are as fierce as tigers.

<sup>22</sup>The gun on my shoulder is a thunderbolt,

<sup>23</sup>(But) how can there be a gun like a thunderbolt?

<sup>24</sup>The gunpowder (in the pursuers' guns) has been mixed well,

<sup>25</sup>(And) the metal bullets fall in rounds.

<sup>26</sup>If you look at (the pursuers' guns), they are thunderbolts.

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<sup>28</sup> Black, as used here, suggests evil and bad luck.

<sup>29</sup> Ya ri A bsod's pursuers are approaching so quickly that it seems as if the grey, paper-like grassland is folding up underneath them, hence shortening the distance and allowing the pursuers to travel very rapidly.

<sup>30</sup> His teeth chatter because he is terrified.

<sup>31</sup> His eyes are red (or pink, like lightning) because he is about to cry.

### Transcription One<sup>32</sup>



#### Persuasive Song (*kha 'bud pa'i glu*)

The oral Tibetan for persuasive song is *kha 'bud pa'i glu* and the written form is *kha twa slob gso'i glu*. *Kha 'bud pa'i glu* literally means 'persuasion song' and *kha twa slob gso'i glu* literally means 'guidance song'. Both terms refer to songs that persuade people to do the right things. O skyid, Mchod rten, and Chos rgyal sang three persuasive songs and are from Mgo log and Mdzo dge.

Elders compose persuasive songs and sing them to younger people. Teaching songs, or *khrid glu*, are a similar genre. Both genres attempt to educate the listener. However, when teaching songs are sung, the audience is unfamiliar with the content and context of the song. They listen carefully and willingly. However, when persuasive songs are sung, the audience is already familiar with the songs' content and context. These songs can be sung in any circumstance in which the singer wishes to guide or persuade listeners to do something, often against their wishes.

In the persuasive song below, Ya ri A bsod tries to persuade his lover to marry someone else, so that her parents would not be punished by the local leader:

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<sup>32</sup> Transcriptions do not include details of vocal nuance and ornament. They represent an average performance of all the verses in a song. The age of the singers and their lack of vocal control caused variability between verses. This made transcription difficult. In the case of one song (example four) transcribing an average rendering was impossible.



Example Two

<sup>1</sup>རྩ་བ་ལྟོང་ལྟོང་ལྟོང་ལྟོང་ལྟོང་།

<sup>2</sup>ཤིང་ཞིག་གི་འབྲེལ་བ་ཅན་པོ།

<sup>3</sup>ཆག་མ་བཞག་ཡིད་ལ་མ་ཡོང་།

<sup>4</sup>ཆག་བཞག་དུས་ཁྱུག་ཀའི་གསར་བ།

<sup>5</sup>ཐང་ཡག་ག་མེ་ཡོང་འདྲ་བོ།

<sup>6</sup>གོས་ངང་ནག་ཐང་ལ་བཤམས་འདྲ།

<sup>7</sup>ཆག་མ་བཞག་ཡིད་ལ་མ་ཡོང་།

<sup>8</sup>ཆག་བཞག་དུས་ཆ་ཤར་བར་མ།

<sup>9</sup>ད་ཕྱི་ཆེན་གྱི་ལི་ལི་བོ།

<sup>10</sup>ཡ་བྱ་བྱག་ཆོ་བྱག་བྱ་ཕྱེ།

<sup>11</sup>འདི་ར་ཆན་དུད་པ་ཅན་པོ།

<sup>12</sup>ཡང་རྩ་བ་མགོན་པོའི་ར་རེད།

<sup>13</sup>སྒྲ་ཕྱགས་གི་ར་ཆན་ཆེ་གི

<sup>14</sup>དོ་ཅིག་གི་དོ་ཆན་ཅེ་གི

<sup>15</sup>གདན་ཁུ་ལིང་ཁེབ་སི་སྒྲེང་གི

<sup>16</sup>གོས་མ་ལོག་ཆ་ཤེས་ཁྱུག་ནས།

<sup>17</sup>རྒྱབ་སྒྱུག་མ་ཚུགས་དུག་འདྲ་བོ།

<sup>18</sup>ལོ་བཙོ་ལྟོང་ལྟོང་བཟང་འཆོ་མོ།

<sup>19</sup>ཁྱོད་དྲིན་ཆེན་པ་མ་གཉིས་གི

<sup>20</sup>ཆོ་འདི་ཡི་ལག་རྟེན་ཁྱོད་ཡིན།

<sup>21</sup>ཁྱོད་རྫོང་བ་སེར་པོ་གསེར་རེད།

<sup>22</sup>གསེར་སེར་པོ་སྤང་ལ་ཆད་གི

<sup>23</sup>ཁྱོད་རྫོང་བ་དཀར་པོ་དཔུལ་རེད།

<sup>24</sup>དཔུལ་དཀར་པོ་སྤམ་ལ་སྤྲིག་གི

<sup>24</sup>དུལ་དཀར་པོ་སྐམ་ལ་སྒྲིག་གི  
<sup>25</sup>བྱིའི་རྫོངས་པ་འདྲོ་རིགས་རྩ་རེད།  
<sup>26</sup>རྩ་འདྲོ་བ་གདང་ང་འདྲིག་གི  
<sup>27</sup>བྱིའི་རྫོངས་པ་གཡང་དཀར་ལྷག་རེད།  
<sup>28</sup>ལྷག་འཆར་མོ་ལྷས་ལ་སྐྱར་གི

<sup>29</sup>བྱིད་ཤིན་ཆེན་པ་མ་གཉིས་གི  
<sup>30</sup>ས་སྐྱིད་ལྷང་སྐྱང་སེར་ཁ་མདྲོག

<sup>31</sup>དཔོན་དབལ་ཤུལ་རྩ་མགིན་མགོན་པོ།  
<sup>32</sup>མགོ་བྱིད་ལ་བདགས་གི་མི་རེད།  
<sup>33</sup>མགོ་བདགས་གི་བྱ་ལོ་སྐྱིད་དགོས།  
<sup>34</sup>རྒྱན་བདགས་གི་ཨ་གསར་ཡག་དགོས།

<sup>1</sup>The colorful plateau's happiness,

<sup>2</sup>Has a relationship with the tree.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>3</sup>When you do not follow a good example, you cannot recall  
(this scene),

<sup>4</sup>(But) when you take the example of the Khri ka<sup>34</sup> boy (you  
can recall it).

<sup>5</sup>The beautiful mirror-like ground,

<sup>6</sup>(Is) like dark brown silk spread out.

<sup>7</sup>When you do not follow the good example, you cannot  
recall (this scene),

<sup>8</sup>(But) when you take the example of the middle Tsha  
shur<sup>35</sup> (you can recall it).

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<sup>33</sup> Meaning unclear.

<sup>34</sup> An unknown location in Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous  
Prefecture, Qinghai Province.

<sup>35</sup> An unknown location.

- <sup>9</sup>Now (behold) the large, orderly village,  
<sup>10</sup>Ya! (And) the six sons from each of the big camps.  
<sup>11</sup>The old smoky tent,<sup>36</sup>  
<sup>12</sup>(And) the Rnga ba<sup>37</sup> leader's goat.  
<sup>13</sup>The old goat at the back of the tent is large,  
<sup>14</sup>(And) the large heaped piles are good.<sup>38</sup>  
<sup>15</sup>The one who (sits) on the carpet of *khu lang*<sup>39</sup> and  
*kheb si*,<sup>40</sup>  
<sup>16</sup>(Sits) on the untainted lambskin (which is) inside the  
silk.<sup>41</sup>
- <sup>17</sup>The back like six-jointed bamboo,<sup>42</sup>  
<sup>18</sup>(Is the back of) fifteen year-old Rnga bza' mtsho mo.<sup>43</sup>  
<sup>19</sup>Your two grateful parents,  
<sup>20</sup>You are like a walking stick for them.<sup>44</sup>
- <sup>21</sup>Your bride-price<sup>45</sup> is yellow gold,

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<sup>36</sup> Indicating that the fire always burns in the tent, and hence that the family is wealthy.

<sup>37</sup> Rnga ba County, Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

<sup>38</sup> The large heaped piles refer to the leader's possessions along the sides of the tent. These piles and the large old goat suggest the leader's wealth.

<sup>39</sup> Expensive black cotton cloth.

<sup>40</sup> A small woolen carpet for important personages to sit on.

<sup>41</sup> Lines fifteen and sixteen describe the Rnga ba leader sitting at the back of the tent.

<sup>42</sup> The back is very straight and beautiful.

<sup>43</sup> Ya ri A bsod's lover.

<sup>44</sup> This expresses the importance of the daughter to her parents: they will rely on her when they are old.

<sup>22</sup>Measured on a scale.

<sup>23</sup>Your bride-price is white silver,

<sup>24</sup>Stacked in a white box.

<sup>25</sup>Your bride-price is an A mdo horse,

<sup>26</sup>(That has been) tethered.

<sup>27</sup>Your bride-price is white sheep,

<sup>28</sup>(That have been) driven into the camp's yard.

<sup>29</sup>Your two grateful parents,

<sup>30</sup>(And your) happy colorful valley, Skong ser.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>31</sup>Rta mgrin mgon po,<sup>47</sup> leader of Dbal shul,<sup>48</sup>

<sup>32</sup>(Rnga bza' mtsho mo) is surrendered to you.

<sup>33</sup>(She) should make you (as) happy (as),

<sup>34</sup>A young man in his finest clothes.

### Transcription Two



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<sup>45</sup> Traditionally, the groom's family gives gifts to the bride's family. The amount and nature of the gifts are negotiated with the family by a matchmaker.

<sup>46</sup> An unknown location. Apparently, two lines are missing from this verse.

<sup>47</sup> The man to whom Rnga bza' mtsho mo was betrothed.

<sup>48</sup> See Lobsang Gelek's (2002) description of Dbal shul.

### Praise Songs (*Bstod glu*)

The literary Tibetan and oral A mdo forms for praise song are both *bstod glu* 'praise song'. Three singers from Mdzo dge and one singer from Rma chu sang four songs praising religious persons, and mountain deities, respected people's horses, and leaders. A related genre, which is perhaps the direct opposite of the praise song, is *smad glu* 'cursing song', sung to insult others, in jest or in earnest.

Apart from the special occasions when these songs are sung to important personages, they might be sung to children who respect their elders, to women skilled at housework, and to men able to earn a good living.

#### Example Three

<sup>1</sup>ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་མཁུན་འཇམ་དབང་ས་བཞད་པ།

<sup>2</sup>ཁྱེད་མི་མཁུན་ནི་བཟེག་མེད་གི།

<sup>3</sup>ཁྱེད་མི་མཁུན་ནི་བཟེག་ཆེ་ཡོད།

<sup>4</sup>ཁྱེད་ས་ཐོབ་བྱང་རྒྱབ་སེམས་དཔའ།

<sup>5</sup>ཁྱེད་སྦྱེས་བྱ་དམ་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

<sup>6</sup>བྱང་དགེ་ལྷགས་གྲུབ་མཐའི་ཡུལ་ན།

<sup>7</sup>ཡང་ཆོས་གྲ་ཆེན་པོའི་སྤྱང་ན།

<sup>8</sup>ཡང་བྱ་ཐུའི་སྤྱང་བོ་བཏབ་ན།

<sup>9</sup>ཡང་དགེ་འདུན་བྱེ་བ་ཆོགས་ན།

<sup>10</sup>ཡང་དམ་པའི་གདམས་ངག་འཛིན་ན།

<sup>11</sup>ཁྱེད་བསྟན་པའི་སློག་ཤིང་ཆོས་རེད།

<sup>12</sup>ཁྱེད་ཐར་བའི་བདེ་ལམ་སྟོན་ན།

<sup>13</sup>ཁྱེད་ཐར་མདོ་རྒྱ་མཚོ་ཆོས་རེད།

<sup>14</sup>ཡང་རིགས་དྲུག་སྦྱེ་བ་ལེན་ན།

<sup>15</sup>ཡང་རྒྱ་ནག་གི་མའི་སྐྱ་འདྲ།

<sup>16</sup>ཡང་རྒྱལ་ཁ་རྩེ་མོ་ཙམ་ཞིག་

<sup>17</sup>སྦྱིད་གསོག་པའི་ལས་ལ་བཞུད་གི

<sup>18</sup>བྱ་ཆེན་པོ་སློག་ལ་རུམ་གི

<sup>19</sup>མ་སེམས་ཅན་ཁོང་ཆའི་ལས་རེད།

<sup>20</sup>ཡང་དམ་ཆེན་ཆོས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་བོ།

<sup>21</sup>ཁྱེད་སྐྱ་འཁོར་སུམ་བརྒྱ་དྲུག་ཅུ།

<sup>22</sup>འདི་གཡས་འཁོར་ལམ་རིམ་ལྗེ་ཆེན།

<sup>23</sup>འདི་གཡོན་འཁོར་བཀའ་ཐང་སྤང་མ།

<sup>24</sup>བཀའ་ཐུགས་དམ་དམ་པོ་བྱེད་དགོས།

<sup>1</sup>All-knowing 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa,<sup>49</sup>

<sup>2</sup>There is nothing unknown to you.

<sup>3</sup>It is impossible that there is something you do not know,

<sup>4</sup>(Because) you have attained the level of a Bodhisattva.

<sup>5</sup>You are the great Dam chen,<sup>50</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Belonging to the great northern Dge lugs pa *grub thob*.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Yang! Among the great monasteries,

<sup>8</sup>Yang! A coral tree is planted.

<sup>9</sup>Yang! Ten million monks assemble,

<sup>10</sup>Yang! Taking the Dharma vow.

<sup>11</sup>Your Dharma is as reliable as a sturdy pillar.

<sup>12</sup>You have taken the fine road of enlightenment,

<sup>13</sup>(And) the great Dharma has enlightened you.

<sup>15</sup>Yang! (You were) born into the six realms of existence.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The founding reincarnation lineage at Bla brang Monastery.

<sup>50</sup> A powerful male deity often depicted in Tibetan Buddhist dances.

<sup>51</sup> A section of the Dge lugs sect of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>15</sup>Yang! (For) the Chinese Emperor,  
<sup>16</sup>Yang! There is only one ultimate victory,  
<sup>17</sup>(But by) doing the work to attain happiness,  
<sup>18</sup>(You), the great son, eager for life,  
<sup>19</sup>Hold the fate of (all) mothers and sentient beings (in your hands).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Yang! Dam chen, King of the Afterlife,  
<sup>21</sup>You have three hundred and sixty attendants.  
<sup>22</sup>You are learned in the right spiraling Lam rim bde chen,  
<sup>23</sup>And the left spiraling Bka' thang srung ma.<sup>54</sup>  
<sup>24</sup>Hold fast to the teachings and instructions!

### Transcription Three



### Prayer Song (*bsod pa 'debs glu*)

The literary Tibetan for prayer song is *bsod 'debs glu*, whereas the A mdo oral form is *bsod pa 'debs glu*. Both literally mean 'prayer song' and are sung to lamas and deities. O skyid, E kho, Sbyin pa, and Rdo rje tshe ring sang five

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<sup>52</sup> Gods, demi-gods, humans, hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals.

<sup>53</sup> Lines fifteen to nineteen compare the 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa to the Chinese Emperor, stating that the latter has limited, worldly powers, while the former's powers are more extensive.

<sup>54</sup> Both Lam rim bde chen and Bka' thang srung ma are Tibetan Buddhist scriptures.

prayer songs. Praise songs request assistance from authority indirectly while prayer songs beseech direct, immediate help. Three of the five prayer songs we recorded ask for children for a tribal leader and one is on behalf of a tribal leader—the Bzhag sdom leader's wife had absconded with a servant, and Ya ri A bsod sang a song wishing for her return. The final prayer song is for the safety and protection for Ya ri A bsod himself.

These songs are sung when people want children and when making daily *bsang* offerings.<sup>55</sup>

#### Example Four

<sup>1</sup>འ་རི་ཡག་ཡ་རི་ཉིན་ཐང་ན།

<sup>2</sup>ཁ་མི་འཆམ་གཤོག་ཀ་བརྩ་གཉིས།

<sup>3</sup>གྲོས་འབྲིག་མོ་བྱས་ཡ་ཐོད་ད།

<sup>4</sup>བྱུགས་བེའུ་ལྷག་སྒྱུང་བའི་གཡང་ར།

<sup>5</sup>ནང་རྒྱ་མཚོ་འཕྱར་གི་ལྷ་བ།

<sup>6</sup>འོ་གྲི་ལིང་སྒྲོང་གི་ཁ་བ།

<sup>7</sup>རྟ་རྒྱོད་མ་རྩོག་རྒྱང་རིག་ཡེ།

<sup>8</sup>དེས་མི་ཚད་རྟེན་རྒྱང་རིག་ཡེ།

<sup>9</sup>རྩ་སུ་བྱ་ཐོག་གི་ཕ་ས།

<sup>10</sup>གན་གནག་མོ་ཞོར་གྱི་ལྷ་རི།

<sup>11</sup>འབྲི་ཐོབ་མའི་ཆེད་ལོ་སྲིག་ཡེ།

<sup>12</sup>དེས་མི་ཚད་བེའུ་རྒྱང་རིག་ཡེ།

<sup>13</sup>རྩོ་གཡའ་མ་བྲག་རི་ཐོན་མོ།

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<sup>55</sup> *Bsang* refers to conifer needles, barley flour, and sugar that are offered daily to local mountain deities.



<sup>14</sup>གན་གཡང་དཀར་ལྷག་གི་སྒྲ་རི།  
<sup>15</sup>འབའ་འཛོར་མོ་བལ་ཁ་ཤིག་ཡེ།  
<sup>16</sup>དེས་མི་ཚད་ལྷག་ཚུང་རིག་ཡེ།  
<sup>17</sup>ལས་ཟེར་བ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གཏམ་དབ།  
<sup>18</sup>ལས་བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱལ་སྤྱི་ལྷ་བདུན།  
<sup>19</sup>ནང་འཛོམས་པ་མར་གྱི་མཚོ་མོ།  
<sup>20</sup>དབྱར་མགོ་མའི་ཆོས་གངས་བཙོ་ལྷ།

<sup>21</sup>དཔའ་རྩལ་ཅན་པོ་བསྟོད་གི  
<sup>22</sup>རྟག་ཤ་རིའི་ཨ་ཁྱེ་མཛད་གི  
<sup>23</sup>མདའ་གསུམ་གི་འབྲས་བུ་བཞག་དུས།  
<sup>24</sup>ཞེ་སྤྱང་པའི་ལོ་དགའ་དགོས།

<sup>25</sup>དབྱང་ཨ་སྟོན་སྒྲ་རིའི་ཆེ་གི  
<sup>26</sup>དབྱང་གན་གི་གནས་པ་འབྲུག་རེད།  
<sup>27</sup>འབྲུག་པོ་རྒྱུང་རྒྱུ་རིག་གི  
<sup>28</sup>དེ་པོ་རྒྱུང་འབྲུག་གི་བུ་ཞིག

<sup>29</sup>ལགས་འཛོན་བཟུང་ཡར་ལ་འབྲུལ་དུས།  
<sup>30</sup>རྩ་ཁྱེ་ཡག་སྒྲ་རིའི་མགོ་བ།  
<sup>31</sup>རྩ་གན་གི་གནས་པ་འབྲོང་རེད།  
<sup>32</sup>འབྲོང་རི་ཐུར་མགོ་ན་འཛོམས་ཡོད།  
<sup>33</sup>འབྲོང་བྲེ་སེར་འབྲོང་གི་བུ་ཞིག

<sup>34</sup>ལགས་འཛོན་བཟུང་ཡར་ལ་འབྲུལ་དུས།  
<sup>35</sup>ནགས་དགའ་ལྷན་སྒྲ་རིའི་མགོ་བ།  
<sup>36</sup>ནགས་གན་གི་གནས་པ་རྟག་རེད།  
<sup>37</sup>རྟག་དམར་ཡག་ཚང་ནས་བྱད་ནས།  
<sup>38</sup>ཡང་རྒྱབ་ལ་ཐིག་ལེ་བབས་ན།

<sup>39</sup> འོ་དམར་ཡག་ལྷག་གི་བྱ་ཞིག

<sup>40</sup> ལགས་འཛིན་བཟུང་ཡར་ལ་འབྱལ་དུས།

<sup>41</sup> འོ་ཐང་ལྷང་མགོ་བས་མགོ་འཛིན།

<sup>42</sup> མ་གི་ཚང་གི་བྱིམ་འཛིན།

<sup>43</sup> འོ་སོང་ན་དག་ལྷ་འཁོར་གི

<sup>44</sup> ད་བཟུང་ན་ས་གཞི་གཞོན་གི

<sup>45</sup> ཡང་རྒྱ་མཁར་ཐོག་གི་བྱ་ཞིག

<sup>46</sup> ཆོག་རྩ་བ་ཅན་གོ་དེ་རེད།

<sup>1</sup>O! (At) the beautiful Mt. Nyin thang,<sup>56</sup>

<sup>2</sup>(The) twelve confederations<sup>57</sup> which disagree,

<sup>3</sup>(If they) stay, discuss, and are agreeable,

<sup>4</sup>This (will be) a prosperous place (for them) to herd  
livestock—calves and sheep.

<sup>5</sup>(On) the central (land) which has arisen from the ocean,

<sup>6</sup>O! (Is) the snow of one thousand horses.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>7</sup>(There) is seen the A mdo mare's mane,

<sup>8</sup>(And) a small stallion is seen beside that.

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<sup>56</sup> A mountain in Mdzo dge County.

<sup>57</sup> A collection of *tsho ba* (cf. D'Ollone 1995 [1912]), see above.

<sup>58</sup> The horses are so numerous that they blanket the ground like snow.

<sup>9</sup>(On the) *su ru*-covered<sup>59</sup> plateau, the homeland of the yak,  
<sup>10</sup>(Is) the holy mountain of the black yak.

<sup>11</sup>(There), the hair on the female yaks and the heifers  
quiver,

<sup>12</sup>(And) a small calf is seen beside them.

<sup>13</sup>The blue rocky slate mountain,

<sup>14</sup>(Is) the holy mountain of the white sheep.

<sup>15</sup>(There), the sheep's wool vibrates as it bleats,

<sup>16</sup>(And) a lamb is seen beside it.

<sup>17</sup>(The action of) karma (is like) a proverb.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>18</sup>(And having good) karma (is like having) the seven  
precious jewels.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>19</sup>The lake of butter (has been) acquired,

<sup>20</sup>On the fifteenth day of summer's beginning.

<sup>21</sup>The great, capable,

<sup>22</sup>Ancestor bestowed the young man (upon us).

<sup>23</sup>When showing the result of three arrows

<sup>24</sup>The unhappy man must be happy.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>25</sup>The holy mountain's top almost reaches,

<sup>26</sup>Dragons in the sky.

<sup>27</sup>(Your) voice is like a male dragon's,

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<sup>59</sup> A small bush, about one meter high, commonly used as fuel and found in high altitude areas, indicating good grass for grazing.

<sup>60</sup> Like a proverb, karma follows its own logic.

<sup>61</sup> They are the jewel, queen, horse, elephant, wheel, general, and minister and are often seen together on temple decorations and *thang ka*, and on such domestic items as bowls.

<sup>62</sup> The exact meaning of this is unclear, but it may imply taking an oath. The complainant must respect the outcome.

<sup>28</sup>(Because you are) the son of a small dragon.

<sup>29</sup>When bringing a gift, show gratitude,

<sup>30</sup>(To) the holy mountain-top on the beautiful plateau.

<sup>31</sup>A wild yak lives on the plateau,

<sup>32</sup>(And when) the wild yaks gather on the mountaintop,

<sup>33</sup>The wild yak's son (is there with them).

<sup>34</sup>When bringing a gift, show gratitude,

<sup>35</sup>(To) the paradise forest on the holy mountain.

<sup>36</sup>A tiger lives in that forest,

<sup>37</sup>(And when the) beautiful red tiger comes out from his  
den,

<sup>38</sup>*Yang!* (And) the striped back appears,

<sup>39</sup>O! The beautiful red tiger's son (is there).

<sup>40</sup>When bringing a gift, show gratitude,

<sup>41</sup>O! (For the) leadership of the Thang lung<sup>63</sup> leader,

<sup>42</sup>Especially his leadership of his family.

<sup>43</sup>O! (If) your protector deity follows you,

<sup>44</sup>Then, wherever you (decide to) go, you can remain.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>45</sup>*Yang!* Son like a thunderbolt the size of a wall.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>46</sup>These words are the root.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The Thang lung 'plain and valley' Tribe lives in contemporary Mdzo dge County, near Rma chu County.

<sup>64</sup> People might not be able to stay in a new place if they have a bad relationship with the *gzhi bdag* (local owner deities) or with local people—this is particularly true of leaders. If people can stay wherever they go, it implies that they are capable and powerful.

<sup>65</sup> The son is physically powerful.

<sup>66</sup> This implies that the words are true, trustworthy, and meaningful.

Story Song (*ma mo'i rnam thar*)

A song that tells a story about people or animals is called *ma mo'i rnam thar* in oral A mdo and in literary Tibetan. O skyid sang in A skyid Village, recounting a ewe's difficult life—insects bite her and herders mistreat her. Ya ri A bsod composed such songs about people and animals, and sang them to both people and animals. Nowadays, such songs are sung to show sympathy to those experiencing misfortune.

Example Five

- <sup>1</sup>འོ་ལྷག་རྩེ་དཀར་པོ་དུང་རེད།  
<sup>2</sup>གི་བཏབ་ནོ་གཡང་གི་ཏྲགས་རེད།  
<sup>3</sup>ཡང་དབྱེད་རྩེ་མགོ་མའི་ནང་ང་།  
<sup>4</sup>དབྱེད་རྩེ་མགོ་མའི་ནང་དུ།  
<sup>5</sup>ལྷག་དཀར་མོ་གོས་བདག་བྱས་ནི།  
<sup>6</sup>གོ་ནང་ལ་ལག་བྱ <sup>67</sup>བྱས་ནས།  
<sup>7</sup>མར་ཁུར་རའི་དོ་གཟུགས་ཅིག་གི  
<sup>8</sup>མ་བྱ་མོར་ལས་དཀར་མ་ལྷང་།  
<sup>9</sup>ལག་ལས་ཀ་འཇོམས་པའི་རྒྱ་རེད།  
  
<sup>10</sup>དབྱར་བཞི་བ་ལྔ་བའི་མཚམས་ན།  
<sup>11</sup>རྩྭ་ཅི་ཤིང་ས་ན་ལྷེ་མ་གི  
<sup>12</sup>འབའ་ཁ་ཅིག་རྒྱབ་ན་ལྷེ་མ་གི  
<sup>13</sup>རྒྱབ་ནག་པོ་རྒྱབ་ན་ལྷར་ནི།  
<sup>14</sup>ཉི་ནག་པོ་བར་འབའ་བཅས་ནི། མི་ནག་པོས་སེན་བྱ <sup>68</sup>བྱས་ནས།  
<sup>15</sup>ཤ་སྐྱེ་མོ་ལྷགས་གི་ཁྲིར་གི  
<sup>16</sup>ངོ་དཀར་པོ་པང་ང་ལྷགས་གི་དུལ་དཀར་པོ་པང་དུ་ལྷགས་གི

<sup>67</sup> ལག་འབྲང

<sup>68</sup> སེན་འབྲང

<sup>17</sup>ཕན་ཐོགས་གི་སྒྲ་ག་གཉིས་རེད།

<sup>18</sup>མ་བྱ་མོར་ལས་དཀར་མ་སྒྲང་།

<sup>19</sup>ལག་ལས་ཀ་འཛོམས་པའི་རྒྱ་རེད།

<sup>20</sup>ཡང་སྟོན་རྩ་མགོ་མའི་ནང་ད་སྟོན་རྩ་མགོ་མའི་ནང་དུ།

<sup>21</sup>ཤ་ཚཱ་པོ་མ་མའི་རྒྱབ་རེད།

<sup>22</sup>བྱ་གཅིས་མ་མ་མའི་ཁོག་རེད།

<sup>23</sup>ཤ་ཚཱ་པོ་ཚོང་གོང་ཆེ་གི

<sup>24</sup>བྱ་རྩེས་མ་ཚར་(ཚ་རུ)གོང་ཆེ་གི

<sup>25</sup>རྒྱ་ཁོལ་མ་རྒྱབ་ནི་སྒྲོལ་གི

<sup>26</sup>རྒྱ་ཐགས་ཐག་ཁུར་ནས་གདའ་གི

<sup>27</sup>འགྲོ་མི་ཤེས་ཏུ་མོ(ཡང་ན་ཏུ་ཅིས་)འདར་གི

<sup>28</sup>འདུག་མི་ཤེས་སྦྱིད་པ་འདར་གི

<sup>29</sup>ཐབས་ལུས་པ་ཡ་མཚན་ཆེ་གི

<sup>30</sup>བྱོ་མི་གནས་བྱི་མའི་ཡུལ་ན།

<sup>31</sup>བྱ་ཡག་པོའི་ཐིག་ལེ་ཅམ་ལ།

<sup>32</sup>བྱོ་ལོ་ན་རྩ་རྒྱ་མེད་མོ།

<sup>33</sup>མོ་མི་རྟེད་བྱི་མའི་ཡུལ་ན།

<sup>34</sup>གཅིག་མ་མཇལ་པན་པ་མེད་གི

<sup>35</sup>བྱོ་མི་གནས་བྱི་མའི་ཡུལ་ན།

<sup>36</sup>སྒྲུ་ཡག་པོ་དར་སྒྲུ་རྒྱབ་གཟུགས།

<sup>37</sup>བྱོ་ལོ་ན་རྩ་རྒྱ་མེད་མོ།

<sup>38</sup>མོ་མི་རྟེད་བྱི་མའི་ཡུལ་ན།

<sup>39</sup>གཅིག་མ་མཇལ་པན་པ་མེད་གི

<sup>40</sup>རྒྱག་འཛོམས་པའི་མ་མའི་རྩམ་ཐར།

<sup>41</sup>དེའི་ཐོགས་ལ་མ་ནི་བཞིག་འདོན། དེ་ཆེད་དུ་མ་ཁི་ཞིག་འདོན།

<sup>42</sup>སྐར་ཁུབ་རྩེས་ཡུལ་ར་ཐོན་ད། སྐར་ཁུབ་རྩེས་ཡུལ་ལ་ཐོན་ཐལ།

<sup>43</sup>རྟགས་ཚང་གི་ཨ་ཁུར་ཐུག་དཀྱི།

<sup>44</sup>ཁྱེད་ཐོན་མོ་བཟང་བཟིག་རེད་ཟེར། ཁྱེད་ཐོན་མོ་བཟང་བོ་རེད་  
ཟེར།

<sup>45</sup>ཁོ་ཐོན་མོ་བཟང་རྒྱ་མེད་ཐལ། རྟགས་པ་མ་འདྲ་བོ་ལྟས་ཐལ།

<sup>46</sup>རྟགས་པ་མ་འདྲ་བོ་ལྟས་ཐལ།

<sup>47</sup>ཞི་དར་དགར་འདྲ་བོ་ཆད་ཐལ།

<sup>48</sup>ཁོ་ཆ་ཐབ་(དུབ་རྩས)ཐུ་བཞིའི་ལ་ཁ།

<sup>49</sup>ཡང་ལྷགས་ནག་ཐེ་ཐིག་ཐིན་གི།

<sup>50</sup>ཁོ་མཁར་(བ་མ)རྩ་མའི་ནང་དཀྱི།

<sup>51</sup>ཡང་རྩ་རྩ་གཡུ་དགར་བསྐྱེལ་གི།

<sup>52</sup>ཡང་མཁར་དགར་ཐྱོགས་རྒྱག་ནང་དཀྱི།

<sup>53</sup>ཡང་འབྲུ་མའི་འོ་ཞོ་ཐུགས་དཀྱི།

<sup>54</sup>ཁོ་རྒྱ་ནག་རྩ་མ་ཤེས་ནང་དཀྱི།

<sup>55</sup>ཟས་གང་གི་ཐེར་ཁ་བཅའ་གི།

<sup>56</sup>ཟས་ཁམ་གསུམ་ཟ་འདོད་མེད་གི།

<sup>57</sup>རྩ་དུབ་གསུམ་འཐུང་འདོད་མེད་གི།

<sup>58</sup>རྒྱ་རོ་དེ་དཔུང་མེམས་ནང་དཀྱི།

<sup>59</sup>ཁོ་རོ་ལེར་དོ་བཟིག་འཐེན་ན། ཁོས་རྩོ་ལེར་དུ་ཞིག་འཐེན་ནས།

<sup>60</sup>དོ་འཐེན་ཞོར་འདང་བཟིག་བརྒྱབ་ཐལ།

<sup>61</sup>ནངས་ཐུ་རེར་གོམ་པ་དགུ་རེ། རངས་པར་རེར་གོམ་དགུ་ཁྱེར་རྟེ།

<sup>62</sup>གོམ་དགུ་བོ་དངན་པ་དགུ་རེད།

<sup>63</sup>རྒྱ་གཙང་བོའི་བཞི་མདོའི་སྟེང་ན།

<sup>64</sup>ཐོག་རི་མོ་བཞག་སྟོམ་དཔོན་ཚང་།

<sup>65</sup>མ་སྟེས་ཡག་མཛོ་བཟའ་མ་ལོ།

<sup>66</sup>མ་སྟེས་ས་སྟོངས་ར་(ས་ཆའི་མིང)ཡུལ་རེད།

<sup>67</sup>ཁྱེད་ས་ཆའི་ཡུལ་གཞིའི་མགོ་ན།

<sup>68</sup>དབྱར་བཞི་བའི་ཁྱ་བྱག་གྲགས་གྲགས།

<sup>69</sup>ཕྱ་ཅི་ཤིང་འདྲེས་བའི་མགོ་ན།

<sup>70</sup>འབྲུ་སྒྲང་མའི་དམངས་སྒྲུ་ལེན་ལེན།

<sup>71</sup>མ་སྒྲིས་ཕྱགས་སྒྲོངས་ར་(ས་ཆའི་མིང)བྱས་ནི།

<sup>72</sup>བཟེག་དྲན་པའི་མགོན་སྒྲོབ་བཞག་ཐལ།

<sup>73</sup>སྒྲིན་དེལ་བྱ་མ་བརྟེན་རྟགས་ཡིན།

<sup>1</sup>O! The white shepherdess (who) is a conch,

<sup>2</sup>(Her) cry is auspicious.

<sup>3</sup>Yang! In the first month of spring,

<sup>4</sup>As spring begins,

<sup>5</sup>(She) makes clothes from sheep wool,<sup>69</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Gathers sheaves in the wheat (field and),

<sup>7</sup>Piles up cheese and butter (in the tent).

<sup>8</sup>Though she makes the work appear easy,

<sup>9</sup>Appearances can be deceptive.

<sup>10</sup>Between the fourth and fifth months, in summer,<sup>70</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Grass and other plants wave (in the breeze).

<sup>12</sup>Black hair waves on the yaks,

<sup>13</sup>(As the) grass bears (their) black backs.

<sup>14</sup>Evil people claw at the (yaks') backs,

<sup>15</sup>(They) reach (out) and (they) take skin.

<sup>16</sup>(They) pour white silver (ornaments) into (her) lap,

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<sup>69</sup> Literally, 'The white sheep are the owner of the clothes' but here indicating that the woman cares for the sheep to get wool and make clothes.

<sup>70</sup> A reference to the lunar calendar. Summer begins after the third lunar month; this line refers to the first two months of summer.



<sup>17</sup>(And that is) another benefit she receives (from her labors).<sup>71</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Though she makes the work seem easy,

<sup>19</sup>Appearances can be deceptive.

<sup>20</sup>*Yang!* In the first month of autumn,

<sup>21</sup>The ewe's back is fatty,

<sup>22</sup>(And) the much-loved lamb is inside the ewe.

<sup>23</sup>The fatty meat will fetch a high price,

<sup>24</sup>(And) the price of lambskins will increase.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Hot water will be boiled on its back,<sup>73</sup>

<sup>26</sup>(And) tying on the lambskin (will be) like (bestowing) a treasure.

<sup>27</sup>Your leg is shaking and you have forgotten how to walk,

<sup>28</sup>You don't know how to stay (because) your leg is shaking.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Wealth is difficult to create.

<sup>30</sup>You won't know how to stay in the afterlife,

<sup>31</sup>(You are) the only spot on a beautiful bird,

<sup>32</sup>(And) you will not become old.

<sup>33</sup>You can't find her because she is in the afterlife.

<sup>34</sup>If you can't meet there, there's no helping you.

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<sup>71</sup> In addition to the piles of food described in the verse above.

<sup>72</sup> Sheep are fattest in autumn, when they are slaughtered. After lambs are born, most male lambs are killed and their lambskins are sold. Lines twenty to twenty-four describe the potential wealth hidden in the pregnant ewe.

<sup>73</sup> The lambskin makes the wearer, a male, warm enough to boil water with his body.

<sup>74</sup> This may suggest that the ewe is afraid, aware that it must be killed for people to realize its potential wealth—fat, meat, and wool.

<sup>35</sup>You won't know how to stay in the afterlife.  
<sup>36</sup>Coarse thread made from the beautiful wool,  
<sup>37</sup>(And) you will not become old.  
<sup>38</sup>You can't find her, she is in the afterlife.  
<sup>39</sup>If you can't meet there, there's no helping you.

<sup>40</sup>(This is) the biography of the sad ewe.  
<sup>41</sup>Chant *ma N*<sup>75</sup> for her.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>42</sup>When the starlight (had) faded, he returned,  
<sup>43</sup>Meeting his lover's uncle,  
<sup>44</sup>Who said, "Your arrival is good."  
<sup>45</sup>Actually his arrival was not good,  
<sup>46</sup>(And) the lover, like parents, was left behind.  
<sup>47</sup>The white silk hung like a trace.<sup>77</sup>  
<sup>48</sup>(And) he, on the rectangular *hub rdzas*.<sup>78</sup>  
<sup>49</sup>*Yang!* Gave the black metal key.  
<sup>50</sup>Inside the black metal pot he,  
<sup>51</sup>*Yang!* Boiled tasty tea.  
<sup>52</sup>*Yang!* Inside the white six-sided bowl he,  
<sup>53</sup>*Yang!* Poured milk and yogurt from the female yak.  
<sup>54</sup>On his Chinese plate,<sup>79</sup>  
<sup>55</sup>A pile of food was placed,  
<sup>56</sup>Even though he didn't want to eat even three mouthfuls  
of food,

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<sup>75</sup> Buddhist mantras.

<sup>76</sup> This appears to be the end of the song, but the singer continued, apparently grafting lyrics from a different song onto the same melody.

<sup>77</sup> Here, the white silk is a *kha btags*, an auspicious white silk scarf. *Kha btags* are hung on a family gate when a girl elopes from her home.

<sup>78</sup> A heated sleeping platform.

<sup>79</sup> The correct translation would be 'Chinese soul', but it is clear that the singer is referring to a plate.

<sup>57</sup>Even though he didn't want to drink even three mouthfuls  
of tea.

<sup>58</sup>The man surrounded by people,

<sup>59</sup>Blows out blue smoke.

<sup>60</sup>Smoking and smoking, he thinks,

<sup>61</sup>(And) takes nine steps in the morning.

<sup>62</sup>(But) those nine steps (were actually) nine sighs.

<sup>63</sup>The rivers' confluence,

<sup>64</sup>(Is the place where you) belong to the Bzhag sdom  
leader (who is) in the picture.

<sup>65</sup>Beautifully born mother *mdzo mo*,<sup>80</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Your birthplace is Smong ra.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>67</sup>In the upper regions of your home place,

<sup>68</sup>The cuckoo sings in the fourth month of summer,

<sup>69</sup>(And) among the grass and the plants,

<sup>70</sup>The bees sing folk songs.

<sup>71</sup>The mother's birthplace, Smong ra,

<sup>72</sup>Helps you recall this scene.

<sup>73</sup>Unless you're a stupid donkey, don't forget (what I've  
said).

#### Transcription Four



<sup>80</sup> A female yak-cow hybrid, renowned for the quality of its milk.

<sup>81</sup> An unknown location in Mdzo dge County.

## LYRICAL AND MUSICAL FEATURES

### Lyrical Features

Each line of verse in all the songs consists of seven syllables. The verses vary in length. Generally, all songs differ from the pattern used in both *glu* 'folksongs' and *la ye* 'love songs',<sup>82</sup> adhering more to the freer form used in *sgrung* (narrative, see Namkhai Norbu (1995) for a description of the form).

The vocables *yang*, *ya*, *da*, and *o* occur in praise songs, prayer songs, and persuasive songs.

Metaphors play an important role in robber and story songs. Below are three examples of metaphors used in the songs we recorded:

ང་ཡ་རི་ཨ་བསོད་སྟག་རེད།

I, Ya ri A bsod, am a tiger

ས་སྐོང་སར་མར་སྤུང་མཚོ་མོ།

The place, Skong ser, is a lake of ghee

ཨ་ལྷག་ཇི་དཀར་པོ་དྲུང་རེད།

O! The white shepherdess (who) is a conch

Similes occurred several times in robber, persuasive, and prayer songs, e.g.:

སྟག་ཟེར་བའི་བྱ་ཞིག་ཆེ་ཡོད།

How can there be a man like a tiger?

རྒྱབ་སྟུག་མ་ཚུགས་དྲུག་འདྲ་བོ།

The back which is like six-jointed bamboo

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<sup>82</sup> See Anton-Luca (2002) for descriptions of these genres.

ཡང་རྒྱ་མ་ཡི་ལ་བ་འཐེན་འདྲ།

Yang! The mane hangs just like a veil

Employing Kohn's (1997) summary of Stein's list of Tibetan literary devices, we note the use of spatial orientation, parallelism, split lines of verse, strong and evocative nature imagery, riddles, and repetition. The usage of such literary devices in the songs of Ya ri A bsod, as do many Tibetan oral traditions, blurs the distinction between oral and literary traditions.

### Musical Features

The length of the collected songs varied between one and three and a half minutes. Robber songs were about ninety seconds long, persuasive songs ninety seconds long (one song lasted thirty seconds), prayer songs about two and half minutes long, and praise songs were about eighty seconds long. Finally, the single story song we recorded was three and a half minutes long. The form of each piece is strophic—the melody is repeated for each verse but lyrics change.

All the songs have a narrow dynamic range and narrow pitch range. Melisma is only present in robber songs. Grace ornamentation is employed in all the songs. Phrases are generally short and undulating, with some use of vibrato. All these songs were sung solo in a natural voice, without accompaniment.

Each tune uses a pentatonic (five pitch) scale. Vocal ornamentation alters some of the pitches, but the overall melodic line is almost the same in each verse. In addition to purposeful ornamentation, there were some changes in pitch, possibly due to the age of the singers or to the unaccompanied nature of the songs.

The meter of each song is mixed, with measures in duple time being predominant throughout. The meter is

adjusted at appropriate times to fit the syllables of each verse. The rhythms stay fairly regular throughout each verse. Hesitations in the rhythms are likely to be caused by breathing and memory lapses. There is often a pause before moving to the next verse. Tempos were regular throughout, except for these pauses.

### Modern Adaptations of Ya ri A bsod

As noted above, a cassette of Ya ri A bsod music has been published, consisting of a single song, thirty-three and a half minutes long. It employs a narrow dynamic range and a narrow pitch range. It is sung solo with mandolin accompaniment. Grace ornamentation and vibrato are used and phrases are generally short and undulating.

This modern adaptation differs from traditional renderings. It is sung accompanied by a mandolin in the modern regional style of *rdung len*<sup>83</sup> and more grace ornaments and vibrato are evident than appear in the examples presented here, recorded from singers who were old and who no longer sing loudly with much melisma. The singer of the song in the cassette sang in a strained rather than a natural voice. On the cassette, stanzas varied between ten and sixty-six lines.

### CONCLUSION

In an alternative version of the robber's song presented above, Ya ri A bsod, as he lies dying, sings, "I, Ya ri A bsod, am a dog." This powerfully reflects on a life of hardship: begging, stealing, itinerancy, homelessness, putting himself at the mercy of local leaders, and even convincing his own lover to

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<sup>83</sup> *Rdung len* is a modern style of Tibetan song from A mdo in which singers accompany themselves on the mandolin.

marry another man. Such is the picture of Ya ri A bsod's life that emerges from his songs and biography. This material not only casts light on this single tragic figure, but also provides a vivid, affective picture of Tibetan nomad life in the early twentieth century.

While noting that in a largely illiterate society, a large corpus of improvised songs, sung only once to limited audiences was likely to have vanished, the current moribund nature of this tradition is likely only to be exacerbated by the factors mentioned above. There is little chance that Ya ri A bsod's songs will survive in the local context for another decade, owing to changes associated with electricity, the mass media, and modern forms of transport. Privatization and resettlement also hamper continued transmission. Furthermore, modern attempts to preserve the work of Ya ri A bsod have involved modification. Ya ri A bsod's songs, and the way of life they described are already a quickly dimming memory.

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## APPENDIX ONE: TIBETAN TERMS

### A

A dban tshang ཨ་དབན་ཚང་།, \*place name

A mdo ཨ་མདོ།, \*place name

A skyid ཨ་སྒྱིད།, \*personal name

### B

Bka' thang srung ma བཀའ་ཐང་སྟུང་མ།, \*scripture name

Bla brang བླ་བརང་།, \*place name

*bltas mdog med gi* བཟླས་མདོག་མེད་གི།, '(he) doesn't look colorful'

Bsam 'phel བསམ་ཤེལ།, \*personal name

*bsang* བསང་།, incense/ smoke offering

*bsod 'debs glu* བསོད་འདེབས་ལྷ།, prayer song (literary Tibetan)

*bsod pa 'debs blu* བསོད་པ་འདེབས་ལྷ།, prayer song (oral A mdo Tibetan)

*bstod glu* བསྟོད་ལྷ།, praise song

'Bul འབུལ།, \*place name

Bzhag sdom བཞག་སྡོམ།, \*tribal name

### C

Chos rgyal ཆོས་རྒྱལ།, \*personal name

Chos sgron ཆོས་སྒྲོན།, \*personal name

### D

Dam chen དམ་ཆེན།, \*deity's name

Dbal shul དབལ་ཤུལ།, \*tribal/ place name

*dge bshes* དགེ་བཤེས།, highly learned Tibetan Buddhist scholar/ monk

Dkon mchog tshe ring དཀོན་མཆོག་ཚེ་རིང་།, \*personal name

Dngul ra དངུལ་ར།, \*place name

Dpa' rtse rgyal དཔའ་རྩེ་རྒྱལ།, \*personal name

*dpon po* དཔོན་པོ།, leader

E

E kho མེ་ཁོ།, \*personal name

G

G.yang kho གཡང་ཁོ།, \*personal name

Gdon གདོན།, evil spirit

*gzhi bdag* གཞི་བདག།, territorial deity

H

*hub rdzas* ལུབ་རྩམ།, heated sleeping platform

J

*jag glu* ཇག་གླུ།, robber's song

'Jam dbyangs འཇམ་དབྱངས།, \*personal name

'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa འཇམ་དབྱངས་བཞད་པ།, \*title/ rank

K

Kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།, \*place name

*kha 'bud pa'i glu* ཁ་འབུད་པའི་གླུ།, persuasive song (oral A mdo Tibetan)

*kha twa slob gso'i glu* ཁ་དྲ་སློབ་གསའི་གླུ།, persuasive song (literary Tibetan)

*kheb si* ཁེབ་སི།, an expensive carpet

*khri dpon* ཁྱི་དཔོན།, leader of 10,000 (households)

Khri ka ཁྱི་ཀ།, \*place name

*khrid glu* ཁྱིད་གླུ།, teaching song

*khu lang* ཁུ་ལང་།, expensive cloth

*khyim tshang* ཁྱིམ་ཚང་།, family/ home

Kun 'brom ཀུན་འབྲོམ།, \*personal name

L

*la ye* ལ་ཡེ།, love song (oral A mdo Tibetan)

Lam rim bde chen ལམ་རིམ་བདེ་ཆེན།, \*scripture name

M

Ma mo'i rnam thar མ་མོ་འི་རྣམ་ཐར།, *The Ewe's Biography*

ma Ni མ་ནི།, Buddhist Sanskrit chant

Mchod rten མཚོད་རྟེན།, \*personal name

Mdzo dge མཛོ་དགེ།, \*place name

mdzo mo མཛོ་མོ།, female yak/ cow hybrid

mgo ba མགོ་བ།, headman

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག།, \*place name

mgur glu མགུར་གླུ།, song of spiritual realization

N

Nyin thang ཉིན་ཐང།, \*place name

O

O skyid ཨ་སྐའ།, \*personal name

P

Pag mo bkra shis པག་མོ་བཀྲ་ཤིས།, \*personal name

R

rde'u 'bum རེ་འུ་འབུམ།, protective pile of white stones

Rdo red རོ་རེད།, \*personal name

Rdo rje tshe ring རོ་རྗེ་ཚེ་རིང།, \*personal name

rdung len རུང་ལེན།, Tibetan mandolin music

Reb gong རེབ་གོང།, \*place name

rgan po གན་པོ།, elder

rgyal po རྒྱལ་པོ།, king

Rma chen རྣ་ཆེན།, \*place name

Rma chu རྣ་ཆུ།, \*place name

Rma lho རྣ་ལྷོ།, \*place name

Rnga ba རྩ་བ།, \*place name

Rnga bza' mtsho mo རྩ་བཟའ་མཚོ་མོ།, \*personal name

Rta bo རྟ་བོ།, \*place name

Rta mgrin mgon po རྟ་འཁྱིན་མགོན་པོ།, \*personal name

Ru skor རུ་སྐོར།, camp

S

Sbyin pa སྐྱིན་པ།, \*personal name

*sde ba* སྡེ་བ།, village

*sde dpon* སྡེ་དཔོན།, village leader

Sgrol ma 'tsho སྒྲོལ་མ་འཛོ།, \*personal name

Sgrung སྒུང་།, narrative

Sha bo don sgrub rdo rje ཤ་བོ་དོན་འགྱུར་རྡོ་རྗེ།, \*personal name

Skal dbang skyid སྐལ་དབང་སྐྱིད།, \*personal name

Skong ser སྐོང་མེར།, \*place name

*smad glu* སྐད་གླུ།, cursing song

Smongs ra སྐོང་ས་ར།, \*place name

Sngags chen སྔགས་ཆེན།, \*personal name

*stong dpon* སྟོང་དཔོན།, leader of 1,000 (households)

*su ru* སུ་རུ།, a bush found on the Tibetan Plateau

T

*thang kha* ཐང་ཀ།, two dimensional Tibetan religious image  
usually painted on cloth

Thang lung ཐང་ལུང་།, \*tribal/ place name

Tsha shur ཇ་ཤུར།, \*place name

Tshe ring sgrol ma ཇེ་རིང་སྒྲོལ་མ།, \*personal name

*tsho ba* ཇོ་བ།, clan/ tribe

*tsho dpon* ཇོ་དཔོན།, clan/ tribal leader

Y

Ya ri A bsod ཡ་རི་ཨ་བསོད།, \*personal name

Ya ri A bsod kyi snying gdam ཡ་རི་ཨ་བསོད་ཀྱི་སྙིང་གདམ།, *Ya ri*  
*A bsod's Heart Speech*

Z

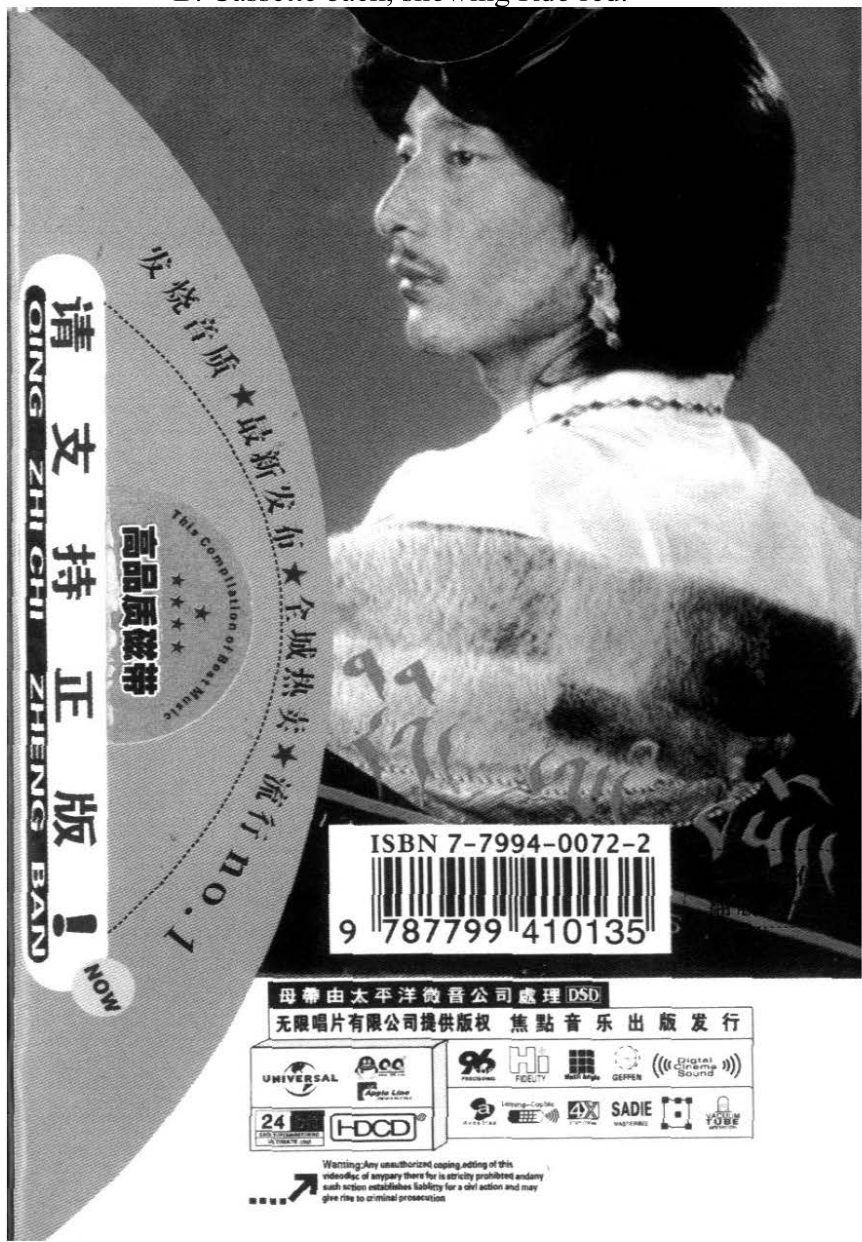
Zhabs dkar tshogs drug rang grol, འབས་དཀར་ཇོགས་རྩལ་རང་  
གྲོ།, \*personal name

APPENDIX TWO: YA RI A BSOD'S HEART SPEECH  
CASSETTE

Cassette front with Rdo red in the inset and, supposedly, Ya ri A bsod.



B. Cassette back, showing Rdo red.



### APPENDIX THREE: MAP AND LOCATIONS

Map of the Study Area (adapted from [www.thdl.org](http://www.thdl.org))



Machen = Rma chen  
Machu = Rma chua  
Ngawa = Rnga ba

Xiahe = Bla brang  
Zolgi = Mdzo dge



Locations in the Text				
Province	Prefecture	County	Township	Village
Gansu 甘肃	Kan lho	Rma chu	Dngul ra A dban tshang	Dngul ra
Qinghai 青海	Mgo log Rma lho	Bla brang	Rta bo	
		Rma chen Henan 河南		
Sichuan 四川	Rnga ba	Reb gong	A skyid	A skyid 'bul
		Mdzo dge Hongyuan Rnga ba		

PURITY AND FORTUNE IN PHUG SDE TIBETAN  
VILLAGE RITUALS

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(Qinghai Normal University)

ABSTRACT

Tibetan concepts of *gtsang ma* (purity) in Phug sde Village (Bla brang Township, Xiahe 夏河 County, Gannan 甘南 Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu 甘肃 Province) are described. The role of purity in manipulating *rten 'brel* (fortune) during village rituals is explored, showing the centrality of purity in Phug sde village life.

KEY WORDS

*gtsang ma*, *rten 'brel*, Phug sde, Bla brang, Gansu, Tibetan

## INTRODUCTION

The nature and importance of concepts related to purity in Phug sde Village, a Tibetan agro-pastoral community located on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau, are examined. The connection between purity and fortune, as demonstrated by village rituals and daily practices, and an introduction to the village are given, followed by detailed explanations and numerous examples highlighting the cultural specificity of these concepts. Daily, annual, and life-cycle rituals are described and the connections between such rituals, fortune, and purity are explored. Purity is an essential condition for successfully avoiding bad fortune and creating good fortune and is a key concern for Phug sde villagers.

## THE VILLAGE CONTEXT

### Location

Phug sde Village is situated in Bla brang<sup>1</sup> Township, Xiahe County, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province, PR China.<sup>2</sup> In the recent past, Bla brang was a political, economic, cultural, and religious center in the region (Nietupski 1999, Gongbao Nanjie 2005). Xiahe County lies in the southeast of Gansu Province, in the northwest of Gannan Prefecture. The county town, Bla brang, is located at longitude 102 degrees and latitude thirty-five degrees; the total area of the county is 6,273.88 square kilometers (Huarui Dongzhi 2005, Gongbao Nanjie 2005).

Xiahe County's multi-ethnic population includes

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<sup>1</sup> Labrang, Larang, Ladrang, Labcheng.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix One for a map showing the location of Xiahe County.

Tibetans (seventy percent), Hui 回 (Muslim Chinese, twenty percent), and Han 汉 Chinese.<sup>3</sup> Adjacent to Bla brang Town is the monastery of Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil, one of the six largest monasteries of the Dge lugs pa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Xiahe County is divided into three towns (*zhen* 镇) and eleven townships (*xiang* 乡): Bla brang, Bang sgar thang, and A mchog towns; and Bsang khog, Rgan rgya, Mda' smad, Dmar thang, Chu sngon, Thang dkar nang, Tsa yas, 'Bor ra, Sgyus tshang, Yar ru rgyud, and Kho tshe townships.<sup>4</sup>

Phug sde Village is three kilometers from Xiahe County Town. Villagers say people have lived there as long as humans have inhabited the earth. Phug sde Village is part of the *lha sde gshog ka bzhi*, a traditionally, though not administratively, recognized collection of seventeen villages<sup>5</sup> divided into upper and lower groups. The villages are near Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil Monastery and, as explained later, villagers have certain ritual responsibilities and privileges there.

There were approximately forty households (~300 people) in Phug sde Village in 2008. All residents were Tibetan. The village is at an elevation of approximately 2,900 meters and is situated in a valley. Villagers are agro-pastoralists and consider themselves to be hard-working. Half of the members of a typical family tend sheep and yaks

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labrang\\_Monastery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labrang_Monastery), accessed 11 August 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix Two for a map of towns and townships in Xiahe County.

<sup>5</sup> The seventeen *lha sde gshog ka bzhi* are Phug sde, Dgar sde, Lang kar thang, Glu rgyags, Za yus, Lam zhur, Mun nag, Sman dkar, Rka grong, Rig sgra, Mtha ba zhol ma, Mtha ba gong ma, Glu thang, Sa dkar, Thang nag, Glas sgrigs, and Mngon mchog.

on the grassland, where they live in tents during summer and adobe houses in winter. The other half of the family lives in houses near the fields. Consequently, families are only united during such village festivities as Lo sar 'New Year' and summer picnics. The villagers are mostly engaged in farming from May to September. From October to April, village men tend sheep and yaks, whereas females travel daily between the pasture and the village from May to September. They sleep at the pastures, milk in the early morning, and after bringing the milk to the village and working in the fields, return to the pasture in late afternoon.

### The Village Economy

Villagers cultivate barley, potatoes, rape, and beans. Other crops and vegetables are not grown because of the high elevation. Eggplant, spinach, onions, tomatoes, wheat flour, and green peppers are purchased outside the village. Fields are located on hills and are not irrigated. The average family annually produces approximately 450 kilograms of barley grain from five *mu* 亩<sup>6</sup> of land. This is insufficient for self-consumption, forcing the purchase of additional barley for human and livestock. There is never enough barley harvested to sell.

The staple diet includes black tea, wheat bread, *rtsam pa* (roasted highland barley flour), and flat noodles. Special guests are served milk tea; steamed buns containing mutton, beef, or pork and onions; and/ or boiled mutton.

The average family in Phug sde has 150 sheep, three cows, three yaks, one donkey, and one mule. There are four seasonal pastures, the furthest of which is eight kilometers from the village. The main income from herding comes from

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<sup>6</sup> One *mu* = 0.0667 hectares.

women selling milk, cheese, yogurt, and yak dung. Yak dung is sold for fuel during winter to people living in the county town. Women sell milk and yogurt to regular customers, earning about thirty RMB per week. In addition, Phug sde Village women are hired by other villages to help harvest. A woman earns twenty RMB from a day's labor.

In addition to women's income, men earn money by transporting sand and stones in mini-trucks from the village to the county town, where they earn approximately 150 RMB per truckload, selling the sand and stone for construction. This is considered good payment, but this work is undependable because sand and stone are not always in demand. Village men also sell two or three sheep when a family is desperate for money, such as when a family member is seriously ill and needs medicine or requires hospitalization. In 2008, one sheep sold for around 300 RMB. However, the animal trade is only done for two autumn months; the animals are too thin to sell during other seasons.

Phug sde villagers did not engage in such migrant labor as construction work in 2008 because their agro-pastoral lifestyle results in year-round work, making absences from the village difficult. Moreover, villagers consider construction work humiliating. Villagers also did not collect caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*), an important source of cash income for many Amdo<sup>7</sup> Tibetans, because they believe digging to be detrimental to the grassland, and insulting to local deities.

Families in Phug sde earn an average of 5,000 RMB a year. Money from the sale of milk, yogurt, and dung is kept by the women while the money from the sale of livestock is

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<sup>7</sup> Amdo/ A mdo refers to northeastern Tibetan areas in China. It is one of three traditionally recognized Tibetan cultural and linguistic areas: A mdo, Khams, and Dbus gtsang.

kept by men. The money earned by men is usually spent on such expenses as children's school's expenses, emergency medical care, barley and wheat for both human and livestock consumption, women's gold ornaments, men's knives worn as decoration, and motorcycles. The money earned by women is usually spent on salt, matches, vegetables (onions and garlic), fruit (apples, oranges, grapes, strawberries, and pears), and such household items as curtains, wallpaper, plates, bowls, cups, and bedding.

Before 2005, each Phug sde villager had to pay 100 RMB plus ten RMB per head of livestock to the local government annually. The average family paid 2,000 RMB per year. Villagers did not pay taxes after the government revoked taxes in 2005.

### Education, Change, Modernity, and Globalization

Most adults were illiterate in Tibetan and Chinese (which most adults could not speak) in 2008. Out of 300 villagers, fifty had a primary school education, fifteen had a middle school education, and seven had a college education. Inability to communicate in Chinese limited trade opportunities and employment opportunities. Out of fifty-six school-aged children, only thirty-seven attended school in 2008. Twenty pupils attended primary school, thirteen students attended middle school, and four attended college in 2008.

A family's oldest son usually remained at home and inherited the property. Boys and girls received education in equal numbers with girls generally attending Chinese language schools and boys enrolling in Tibetan language schools. Girls usually finished schooling after attending *zhongzhuan* 中专 (technical schools) in Hezuo 合作 (the capital of Gannan Prefecture), while boys more commonly

finished university in the provincial capital, Lanzhou 兰州 City.

The first gravel road to Phug sde Village, a narrow, one-lane road, was built in 1958 by locals. The local government widened this road and resurfaced it with compressed earth in 1980. The road was improved again, being widened and resurfaced with asphalt from 2005 to 2008.

The first motorcycle appeared in Phug sde Village in 1998. Later, nearly every family had at least one motorcycle; some had two. The first small trucks and tractors appeared in the village in 2000. Earlier, people rode bicycles to the county town, and rode a mule or horse to mountain pastures.

Since 1960, when local villager 'Brug thar rgyal (male, b. 1947) and other villagers travelled four days to transport materials necessary to bring electricity to the village, Phug sde has had electricity used for lighting and powering radios. One watt of electricity cost 0.80 RMB in 2008. The power supply was lost at least once a month, creating inconvenience for one or two days. Apart from media technology (below) people used electricity to power refrigerators, irons, and sewing machines.

The first battery-powered radio came to Phug sde Village in 1980. Tshe dar skyid (female, b. ~1950) took part in a singing competition in Hezuo City and won it as a prize. The first tape-players came to the village in 1989, brought from Linxia 临夏 City by a local businessman. Telephones arrived in 2000.

In the 1990s, one village family had a black and white television, which all villagers watched. In 2000, satellite television arrived and, in 2005, the first VCD players arrived. In 2008, villagers did not watch DVDs. People usually watched Tibetan programs on television and on VCDs. Television's popularity made radio obsolete. All village households had televisions and VCD/ DVD players,



which they used daily. Some televisions were connected to satellite dishes that received foreign broadcasts and a wide range of Chinese television stations.

## *RTEN 'BREL* (FORTUNE) AND *GTSANG MA* (PURITY)

### *Rten 'brel* (Fortune)

'*Rten 'brel*' appears to have entered the Tibetan language as a translation of the Sanskrit term *pratītyasamutpāda* (Samuel 1993). The Tibetan Translation Tool<sup>8</sup> includes the following translations for *rten 'brel*: dependent-arising, interdependence, supporting links, interrelation, relativity, connection, occurring in/ coming into being through interdependent connection, and interplay of circumstances.

In addition to these complex philosophical definitions, Samuel (1993:447-448) notes that:

The point is the range of additional meanings that *tendrel* [*rten 'brel*] has acquired in Tibetan usage. These center around the idea of 'omen,' especially in the sense of an indication that circumstances are auspicious for a particular action or development. The underlying concept is something like 'connections that are not visible on the surface'.

Definitions of the term employed by Phug sde villagers accord with Samuel's second definition of the term, and with the definitions that include 'omen', 'coincidence', etc. When asked for definitions of *rten 'brel*, locals provided the following responses:

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.thdl.org/tibetan/servlet/org.thdl.tib.scanner.OnLineScannerFilter?thdlBanner=on>, accessed 11 August 2008.

- This word was originally a religious<sup>9</sup> word, and has two categories: good and bad (male, b. 1977).
- Our life is steeped in *rten 'brel*, regardless of whether we are doing important or unimportant things. *Rten 'brel* are important when we hold rituals, give birth, and make plans. For example, a rainbow crosses the sky, rain falls, we meet people carrying full buckets of water, birds sing... (male, b. ~1963).
- *Rten 'brel* is an auspice or a pre-decision based on natural signs that indicate if something we are planning will succeed. For example, it is bad if a crow or fox cries before you do something (male, b. ~1973).
- *Rten 'brel* determines whether an event will be successful (female, b. ~1932).
- For me, *rten 'brel* are the decision-making tools I consult before doing something. For example, if I meet a person carrying a full bucket of water, this encourages me and I believe that my work will be completed successfully, but if I meet an empty bucket, it discourages me or gives me a belief that the work will be unsuccessful (female, b. 1963).

*Rten 'brel* exists within a matrix composed of a number of closely associated concepts Phug sde villagers use to explain why things are the way they are. When trying to explain the reason some people are wealthy, others poor; some people are ugly while others are good-looking; some

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<sup>9</sup> The Tibetan word used was *chos*, usually translated as 'religion' or 'dharma'. Clarke (1990) points out, however, that the word also implies 'customary order' or 'order'.

people are successful while others are not; why some families have many educated children and others few; and why disaster befalls this person or family, but not the other, Phug sde villagers employ any of the following concepts: *g.yang*, *rten 'brel*, *bsod nams*, *bkra shis*, *rlung rta*, *las*, and *dge ba*. To illustrate the difficulties involved with distinguishing and translating these terms, one might ask non-specialist English speakers to differentiate between chance, fate, luck, fortune, karma, destiny, happenstance, providence, and coincidence, and to theorize on how these are related to effort, merit, work, and value, and then translate this into another language. Complex and discrete definitions could be created by recourse to etymology, discourse analysis, and so on, but most English speakers employ these words without recourse to such measures. When Phug sde villagers use *g.yang*, *rten 'brel*, *bsod nams*, *bkra shis*, *rlung rta*, *las*, and *dge ba* they do so employing mostly fuzzy,<sup>10</sup> intuited, affective definitions, making precise translation difficult.

We gloss *rten 'brel* as 'fortune'; da Col (2007) translates it as 'happenstance', and Clarke (1990) gives 'material prosperity'. Our gloss should be understood only within the context of the following explanation of related concepts, and of the many examples given below. We do not suggest that *rten 'brel* and 'fortune' map precisely onto one another.

Within one's current life, a person may improve their circumstances by performing *dge ba* 'acts of virtue'. These might include offering butter lamps in a monastery or shrine, not eating meat, abstaining from killing, and offering food to funeral participants. Performing *dge ba* creates *bsod nams*,

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<sup>10</sup> 'Fuzzy' is not used in a pejorative sense suggesting something unclear, unknown, vague, or misunderstood, but to suggest ideas that overlap and interconnect.

which Clarke (1990) translates as 'merit', and da Col (2007) as 'karmic storage'. *Bsod nams* gives positive results in one's current lifetime, such as wealth and health. For this reason, one might expect that a person such as a butcher, constantly involved in non-virtuous action, would find it difficult to experience wealth and health; however, this clearly happens. This can be seen as the result of *las*. *Las* is usually translated as 'karma', but is more often employed in the mundane sense of luck. It refers to outcomes resulting from actions outside this lifetime. If a butcher becomes rich, this is because of his good *las*. A person who has good *las* will, as a result, also have *rlung rta* 'reputation'. *Rlung rta* is both the good talk, and a positive force, surrounding those who are successful.

Also related to *bsod nams*, *las*, *dge ba*, and *rlung rta* is *g.yang*. We define *g.yang* as 'potency', following Tooker's (1996) translation of the Akha term *gylàn*. Potency exclusively applies to property and the ability to acquire or create more of it. Having much *g.yang* means that one will have a good harvest, healthy livestock, a stable family, success in business, and so on. When a woman marries into a new home, her natal family will hold a *g.yang 'bod* 'potency calling' ritual to prevent her from diminishing her natal family's *g.yang* by taking *g.yang* to her new home.

Finally, the idea of *bkra shis* must be discussed; the fortuitous coming together of all or most of the above mentioned forces. If one performs many *dge ba*; has a big *bsod nams*; the appropriate *las*, *rlung rta*, and *g.yang*; and if all the necessary *rten 'brel* are present, then this is *bkra shis*. All success and good results will surely be manifested.

As stated above, within the context of this matrix of concepts, and their fuzzy, overlapping nature, we have glossed *rten 'brel* as 'fortune', an important concept for Phug sde villagers. Creating *rten 'brel bzang po* 'fortuitous circumstances' and avoiding *rten 'brel ngan pa* 'misfortune'

(or 'unfortuitous'<sup>11</sup> circumstances'), are persistent concerns, and are the main motivations for performing the numerous rituals briefly outlined above. The following example shows the difference between good and bad fortune: a businessman, going to do business after Lo sar, will carefully watch for signs. If he meets a woman carrying a full bucket of clean water, this is fortuitous for him. On the other hand, if he meets a woman carrying an empty container, this is considered ominous.

Apart from good and bad fortune, Phug sde villagers also distinguish between naturally occurring fortune and created fortune.<sup>12</sup> Snow or rain before a long journey is an example of naturally occurring fortune. An example of created fortune is parents asking monks to chant before their children take important tests, such as college entrance exams.<sup>13</sup>

The following examples of good fortune were collected from consultants in Phug sde and further illustrate the concept. It is considered fortuitous when:

- a rainbow appears when a lama visits.
- guests are offered food and drink from a bowl decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols.
- a layman, on his way to become a monk, meets a person carrying a full container of milk.

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<sup>11</sup> We use this neologism since 'unfortunate' carries the implication of unlucky/ pitiful, and misfortune/ misfortunate implies accident (al) or unlucky.

<sup>12</sup> There are no specific Tibetan terms we are aware of for these types of fortune.

<sup>13</sup> This is also considered *dge ba*.

- a monk's string of beads breaks when he is debating; the weight of his knowledge is thought to break the string.
- livestock in the village give birth, or if a villager gives birth, before someone undertakes a journey to see a doctor; these indicate that the patient will recover. Birth is also considered fortuitous when people begin such new endeavors as building a house, marrying, or starting a new business venture.
- it rains, snows, or thunders when people go to religious sites<sup>14</sup> to offer *gter kha*.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is considered fortuitous if herds of yaks or sheep are seen in the pastures, and if snakes are seen. These signs all mean that the *klu* 'water spirits' are welcoming the people.
- New endeavors are begun on the first, eighth, fifteenth (the full moon), and thirtieth of each lunar month. During the first lunar month, the first, third, and fifth are also considered fortuitous. It is considered especially fortuitous to see a person carrying meat or bread with white sheep wool on it on these days.
- encountering a freshet running downhill while walking uphill after heavy rain symbolizes a new

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<sup>14</sup>This is often the *lab rtse* (locally, a mountain altar consisting of a stone base into which large wood arrows are inserted) of the village's natal deity, but may also be Rta rdzong Lake, which is near Bla brang Town and considered sacred by local people.

<sup>15</sup>*Gter kha* are small white cloth bags of wheat or barley buried in the earth or thrown into water to create wealth and well-being for a family or individual.

start, or the advent of good occurrences. People meeting the head of a freshet splash water upwards three times. A local saying describes this: "*Chu sna rgya mo yar la mchod* Offer up the water's head."

- the surface is full of yellow butter when yogurt is made.
- livestock give birth to females and women give birth to males.

A sickle, knife, or a dab of milk or yogurt is placed on top of the pile of grain-bags. Each bag is tied with white wool to create good fortune after a harvest. This ensures that the harvested grain will last until next harvest and the harvest will not be stolen by *the'u rang* malicious spirits (explained later), eaten by pests, or otherwise lost.

The following are examples of unfortuitous things:

- meeting a corpse at any point on a journey;
- meeting people carrying *gtor ma* (dough effigies generally employed to exorcise evil) on a journey;
- hearing a fox or crow cry, especially when undertaking a new endeavor;<sup>16</sup>
- meeting people coming out of a house with ash from the stove;
- being offered tea or food from a chipped or cracked bowl;

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<sup>16</sup> See Lauffer (1914) for a translation of a manuscript on 'bird divination' and Norbu Chopel (1983) for a description of the 'language of ravens'.

- seeing a whirlwind turning in a counterclockwise direction;
- meeting a woman combing her hair is unfortuitous for monks;
- milk boiling over or spilling; and
- hearing wolves howl near the village.

Not all signs of fortune are unambiguously good or bad. Encountering an empty water container is usually considered unfortuitous, but the saying, "*Stong ba thams cad gang ba zer* Empty containers will soon be full," demonstrates that the symbolism of such containers is open to interpretation. Likewise, a broken bowl is normally considered unfortuitous, but the saying "*Kha dbur chag na kha mgo bde*, If the rim is broken, the body will be healthy," indicates that this may also be interpreted as fortuitous.

### *Gtsang ma* (Purity)

Definitions of *gtsang ma* provided by the Tibetan Translation Tool<sup>17</sup> include clean, hygienic, sanitary, pure, sanctified, celestial, immaculate, clear, neat, sterile, without faults of stains or violations, full, and complete.

Phug sde villagers' understandings of the term mostly accord with these definitions, and include:

- Water is the cleanest thing. For example, anything that is considered dirty is again clean after being washed in water. When we offer *bsang* or other things we always wash our hands with water beforehand (male, b. ~1965).

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<sup>17</sup> Accessed 11 August 2008.



- My understanding of *gtsang ma* has two parts: one is genetically clean, the other is purification; making dirty things clean. For example, when people free animals, they mix water and milk and pour it on the animal, purifying the body. After people fast they take a mouthful of water, rinse, and spit it out, which purifies speech. When people talk about the cleanness of a family like 'clean blood' or 'clean bone' they mean genetically clean. This is inherited from the ancestors. A woman's menstrual cycle is a form of bodily purification. When monks offer holy water to people, they usually drink a little and then pour it on people's heads. This purifies the body, and is spiritually purifying too (male, b. ~1979).
- A young widow is considered unclean. Generally *gtsang ma* is considered as an absence of *bse dri*<sup>18</sup> and *the'u rang*. If a family has neither of these and the children die after birth, this family is also considered unclean (female, b. ~1966).

We have chosen to translate *gtsang ma* as pure/purity, though it is more commonly employed in the mundane sense of 'clean'. *Gtsang ma* suggests a sense of not covered by dirt, *bse dri*, or other pollution, such as from touching the corpse of any animal that is not usually eaten. A word with similar meaning to purity is *gral dag* 'neat', 'tidy'.

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<sup>18</sup> Bad odor. Phug sde villagers recognize two types of bad odor. One refers to unpleasant odors that are not considered polluting: the smell of roasting meat, and of burning hair or fingernails. The other type of bad smell, *bse dri*, refers to what villagers consider a biological condition causing the armpits to emit an odor suggesting a blend of garlic and flatulence. This condition is thought to be patrilineally inherited.

However, a home might be tidy, but the location may not be pure. A related term is *yag pa* 'beautiful'. A woman might be beautiful, but may not necessarily be pure (see Makley 2007 for a discussion of local gendered concepts of purity). Generally, 'beautiful' means 'pure', but not in the context of marriage and religious rituals.

The opposite of *gtsang ma* is *mi gtsang pa* 'unclean'. Related negative terms are *sbags* and *grib* both of which mean 'defiled' or 'polluted'; *sbags* applies to things whereas *grib* applies to people's bodies.<sup>19</sup> Here are two examples of defilement. If a child drops a piece of bread into pure water, then the water is called *sbags*; it now cannot be offered to *gzhi bdag* or *srung ma* deities. In school, when students sleep in bunk beds in their dorms, sometimes the student on the lower bunk becomes sick or gets pimples. Parents usually say that this person is *grib* because they were sleeping beneath people.

Purity is defined according to circumstances and may be categorized as bodily, socially (in behavior, speech, and mind), and in terms of location. Pure in body means that people are not physically disabled, and do not have *bse dri*. If someone is socially pure, it means that their mind, speech, and behavior are properly oriented towards others. A location is pure if nobody has been killed and no corpse has

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<sup>19</sup> *Grib* may apply to animals in certain cases, such as a lama's horse. Huber and Pederson (1997:587) refer to *grib* as "embodied moral contamination" whereas Mills (2005:354) explains *grib* as: "[it] is seen as being localized to a single lifetime, curable through direct ritual and medical means, and unrelated to the *intention* of the polluted person." Schicklgruber (1992) chooses to translate the term 'chaos' (as opposed to social order), while Diemberger (1993:117) gives "... the name for the unnamable, the undefined, the 'shadow'."

been buried there. Also, a place may be unclean if *tshwa tshwa*,<sup>20</sup> *rde'u 'bum*,<sup>21</sup> or scriptures have been buried there, which is sometimes done to ensure success in such endeavors as business and education.

As described above, bodily purity relates to an absence of bad odor. Related to the body, but to the bloodline of families rather than to individuals, is the presence or absence of *the'u rang*, detailed later.

Closely related to bodily purity is behavioral or social purity. The socially pure body is used respectfully, such as prostrating to lamas and elders. Butchering is also unclean behavior.

Social purity is exemplified by pure speech, which should be gentle, clear, and polite. Unclean speech concerns the use of foul language related to male and female genitals, women's menstruation, and to cursing people by saying such things as *A pha shi* 'dead father'. In Phug sde Village, it is more acceptable for women to curse than men, because women are considered to be more talkative than men. Men who curse a great deal are considered feminine. It is acceptable for uneducated people to curse more; educated people and monks should never curse if they want to be respected.

Social purity is also shown by purity of mind. Those devoid of pride, jealousy, and ambition are considered to have a pure mind. However, a certain amount of pride is acceptable for educated people, some jealousy is acceptable for women, and ambition is tolerated more in men than in women.

The purity of a location depends on its history rather than its appearance. If disasters befall an area, it is inhabited by malicious spirits and is polluted; for example, a house

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<sup>20</sup> Stamped clay Buddhist images.

<sup>21</sup> White stones.

where someone has committed suicide is considered impure. Great care is given to the purity of the place where a corpse is disposed of. A family is also very concerned about the cleanliness of the new house and invites a local lama to chant and burn pine needles to purify the new location.

Purity generally has a vertical dimension. Pollution flows downwards, but rarely upwards, and therefore the higher up something is placed, the less likely it is to become polluted. For example, deity images are placed up high, and holy and respected persons are seated higher than normal people. Further illustration of this is that stepping over things and people is polluting, and that the lower part of clothes, such as trousers, underwear, socks, and shoes should not be put near people's heads, regardless of how well or recently they have been washed.

Yellow is considered noble and holy, and white is considered pure.

Finally, it is important to note that purity is the primary condition for creating good fortune. *Gang* 'fullness' (of containers, the moon, etc.), is the other main condition. The following section examines how the connection between purity and fortune is manipulated in Phug sde Village rituals.

## FORTUNE AND PURITY IN VILLAGE RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Phug sde villagers perform daily, annual, and life cycle rituals to create fortuitous circumstances and avoid unfortuitous ones; such rituals must ensure purity is created and maintained to be efficacious. Here, daily, annual, and life-cycle rituals are examined in terms of how purity is used to create good fortune.

## The Daily Cycle

Phug sde villagers perform various rituals throughout the day. Typically, village women get up at six a.m. to milk and do other chores. Men get up an hour later. Anyone habitually asleep after eight o'clock is considered abnormal. Men get up, wash their face and hands, brush their teeth, and then offer *bsang*<sup>22</sup> on a *bsang khri* 'bsang altar', which is usually on the courtyard wall above the gate. The *bsang khri* should be in a high place: the higher the better. While offering *bsang*, men chant the local *bsang yig* 'bsang scripture'. *Bsang* is offered to the local *gzhi bdag* 'mountain deities'. Phug sde Village has three *gzhi bdag*, the most important of which is the *skyes lha* 'natal deity', A myes drag dmar. He is considered more important than the other village *gzhi bdag*, A myes stag ri and A myes bya khyung. *Gzhi bdag* are *dri bzal*, meaning they can only eat odors, not the solid foods eaten by humans; hence fragrant offerings are burnt for them. Villages believe that if they make regular offerings, *gzhi bdag* will help them when needed. It is unacceptable if people only make offerings when they need help, or if *gzhi bdag* do not aid those who make regular offerings.

The next daily ritual takes place immediately after offering *bsang*. Seven small bowls of clean water (*mtshod pa bshams* individually, *bdun tshar* when in a group of seven) are cleaned by rubbing them with a clean cloth. The cloth may have dirt or butter on it, but must not be contaminated by any trace of meat, garlic, or onion. The bowls are then placed in front of images in the shrine room, together with

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<sup>22</sup> The Tibetan Translation Tool (accessed 11 August 2008) defines *bsang* as "smoke offering; purify with incense; consecrate, bless, cleanse, purify, sanctify, clear away; (incense); purification and payment offering. Smoke-puja." It usually consists of conifer needles and *rtsam pa*.

incense. The images these are offered to are *thang ka* (religious images on cloth, silk, or canvas) of such deities as Shakyamuni Buddha, Green Tara, White Tara, and Manjushri, and photographs of important local lamas. *Gzhi bdag* are not enshrined in Phug sde Village. The men then prostrate three times in front of the images, while chanting the *bsang yig*.

A final ritual (*bsur*) is performed before eating breakfast. Smoldering coals are taken from the stove on a *me skyogs* (a ladle used to add fuel to the fire) and then the man performing the *bsur* goes just outside the room. The coals are placed on the *bsur phud sa* (a one meter high post used only to offer *bsur*) and a little *rtsam pa* and *chab*<sup>23</sup> are sprinkled onto the coals. This ritual is performed for souls wandering in *bar do*,<sup>24</sup> for ancestors, and for the *srung ma* 'household protector deity'.

If the man has time, *shug bdug* is performed by placing coals on the *me skyogs* again, sprinkling juniper leaves on top, and fumigating the room. This ritual purifies the room, household objects, and people's bodies. Afterward, he eats breakfast. All of these rituals may be performed by a woman if no man is available.

Most people are busy with work during the remainder of the day. Elders who no longer do much manual work, chant, spin a hand-held prayer wheel, prostrate before the shrine, circumambulate the prayer hall, and gather inside the *ma Ni khang* 'prayer hall' in the afternoons to chant, turn the large prayer wheel, and chat. Sick people prostrate before the shrine and circumambulate the prayer hall. These activities are considered to positively affect the next life or, in the case of an ill person, the present life.

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<sup>23</sup> A small amount of water used as an offering. *Chab* is the honorific form of the regular word for water, *chu*.

<sup>24</sup> The intermediate stage between death and rebirth.

The water offerings in the home shrine are removed late in the afternoon before dinner. The water is emptied (usually onto a plant), the bowls are stacked side-by-side to dry, and a butter lamp is lit and placed in front of the shrine. This is usually done around dinner, when darkness has fallen, but is done earlier if an animal is being slaughtered that day.

The family chants *Sgrol ma* and *Skyabs 'gro*<sup>25</sup> after a meal at nine or ten p.m., led by the male family head. There are a certain number of times to chant the different texts. For example, *Sgrol ma* should be chanted twenty-one times. Chanting is done to benefit the family, to protect against illness, and to increase the family's wealth. After chanting, people go to bed. The daily cycle is repeated the next morning.

Locals believe that if they regularly perform daily rituals, the deities and other beings to which they sacrifice will protect them. Performing these rituals creates good fortune for individuals and for the household. Fortuitous signs associated with daily offerings indicate that the offerings please the deities. Deities are very pleased with the offering if the flame burns brightly when *bsang* is offered. It is fortuitous if smoke from *bsang* offerings hovers above the village like fog. It is also fortuitous if flower-shaped ice crystals form in water offering bowls in winter and it is fortuitous if butter lamp wicks split in two at night—the appearance of two things from one indicates prosperity.

A family is worried and uncomfortable all day if they lack time to do a daily ritual. Householders watch anxiously for signs of their success or lack thereof when performing daily rituals, as Tshe sgron (female, b. ~1945) describes:

One winter morning, I went to the shrine room to do

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<sup>25</sup> *Skyabs 'gro* may be translated as 'taking refuge' and may refer to any one of several different texts.

morning rituals. At that time, I saw that one of the bowls was full of lotus-shaped ice crystals, and over night the wick in a butter lamp had split. I felt overjoyed and knew that something good was about to happen to the family.

For all daily rituals, both the implements and the people performing the rituals must be pure; impurity displeases the deities. Hands must be washed, and should not have touched meat, garlic, or onion and bowls must be washed, and butter and water must be clean. Bowls cannot be washed in detergent, because anything related to commercial chemicals is considered impure. Measures are taken to ensure the purity of butter used in offerings. Before milking female yaks, the woman doing the milking (never a man<sup>26</sup>) must wash her hands in water. Soap is not used because it is perfumed and this odor displeases the deities. This ensures that the milk, which will later be used to make butter that may be used as an offering, will be clean.<sup>27</sup> *Bsang* to be offered to deities must not be stepped over, cannot have blood on it, and must not have been lain on by animals. Finally, the vertical dimension of purity necessitates that the *bsang khri* be placed as high as possible to ensure the purity of the offering. The following account demonstrates the importance of not offering unclean things to deities:

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<sup>26</sup> "*Pha bzang pas bzhon ma mi bzho/ Ma bzang mas mtshon cha mi 'dzin* A good man never milks and a good woman never touches a weapon," epitomizes local notions about the gendered division of labor, Mixing gender roles is thought to bring bad luck.

<sup>27</sup> The oldest butter is given when offering butter. Rancid butter (after about a year) is not considered unclean for the deities. Commercial butter is considered unclean and not used in offerings.



In 2007, Mgon po (male, b. ~1956) went to Bla brang Monastery to offer *bsang*. When he entered the temple, a monk was shouting angrily to the visitors not to offer commercially produced barley flour. The reason was that many birds that usually ate the barley near the *bsang khri* had died because the commercially produced barley contained insecticide. Such pollution would, in addition to killing birds, certainly displease the deities.

### The Annual Cycle

Whereas the purpose of daily rituals is to create good fortune for the family or for individuals, the purpose of annual rituals is to create good fortune for the entire *lha sde gshog ka bzhi* or the Phug sde Village community. However, the focus is on the family in the case of Lo sar (New Year). Although villagers hold numerous rituals in the village and attend rituals in Bla brang Monastery, we focus on Lo sar, Smon lam, and Drug pa'i ma Ni, because of their local importance in creating good fortune.<sup>28</sup>

#### Lo sar

Preparations for Lo sar begin in the twelfth lunar month. On the fifteenth day, the *bsang khri* is restored and on the eighteenth and nineteenth days, the house is thoroughly cleaned (locally called *du ba 'phyag pa* 'sweeping smoke'). On the twenty-fifth day, the stove inside the house is renewed,<sup>29</sup> and on the twenty-ninth day, trash from cleaning

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<sup>28</sup> For brief descriptions of annual rituals not included here, see Appendix Three.

<sup>29</sup> If the stove is adobe, fresh adobe is applied to make the surface smooth. Fresh concrete is applied in a similar way if

the house is discarded in the lower part of the village, fresh water is fetched, and the family eats a special meal known as *dgu thug* 'nine noodles'.<sup>30</sup> Lo sar begins at midnight.

Lo sar is held from the first to the sixteenth day of the first lunar month, though preparations begin several weeks earlier (see below). On the first day, people rise at midnight, set off firecrackers, offer *bsang*, eat a family meal, and then children go from house to house in the village visiting relatives. Meanwhile, other family members visit relatives and villagers, especially the homes in which a family member has died.<sup>31</sup> Everyone except those in mourning wear new clothes. They continue visiting one another for the remainder of Lo sar, except on the *nyin nag* 'black day', which falls on the seventh day of the first lunar month and is considered inauspicious. Skra phab (see the section on life-cycle rituals) is held on the third day and weddings are held on the fifth day of this month. On the eighth day, people visit Bla brang Monastery for the first time in the new year. *Tshe thar* rituals are held to consecrate animals and plants. Plants are uprooted, brought to the monastery, and planted in a special enclosure known as the *tshe thar ra ba*. There they are protected and may not be cut or damaged. Animals are consecrated to the village's *skyes lha* and may not be slaughtered or sold.

Lo sar creates good fortune for the coming year. In certain nearby agricultural communities, though not in Phug

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the stove is concrete. This is done by the senior woman of the household.

<sup>30</sup> Explanations for the name vary. The nine may refer to the twenty-ninth, the date on which the meal is eaten, or to the fact that some people believe nine bowls should be eaten, or that the meal should contain nine ingredients. The first author's family normally eats boiled or steamed dumplings.

<sup>31</sup> Villagers take special care to visit households in mourning, however, no celebrations take place during such visits. Guests visit, bring gifts, chat, and leave.

sde Village, chunks of ice are placed on the walls surrounding houses. These translucent decorations are considered clean, and hence fortuitous. Cleaning the house, restoring the adobe stove inside the house, restoring the *bsang khri*, discarding refuse in the lower part of the village, and fetching water before the beginning of New Year all purify the house and ensure good fortune for the family in the coming year. Wearing new clothes, especially for children, and offering clear liquor to guests, also create good fortune.

People visiting each other, especially when children visit elders, exchange words considered to be pure, such as "*Lo sar bzang* Happy New Year" or "*Tshe ring lo rgya* May you have a life of one hundred years" and prostrate, exemplifying socially pure behavior. The good fortune created by this is for the individuals exchanging the words and performing the actions. Similarly, offering *kha btags*, white symbols of purity, creates good fortune for people in the coming year.

The *tshe thar* ritual performed during Lo sar also exemplifies the connection between purity and fortune. If a family holds this ritual to free one animal each year, then locals believe they will have good luck and all inauspiciousness in the family will gradually diminish. Sometimes, to create good fortune and treat illness, a family holds *tshe thar* at times other than Lo sar. The following account attests to local beliefs regarding the efficacy of offering *tshe thar* to create good fortune and thus cure illness.

One of Klu mo skyid's (female, b. ~1982) teeth became infected in 2006. A doctor advised her to pull it out, but she refused. Her father went to a local lama for advice. The lama chanted scripture for a while, gave a consecrated string to Klu mo skyid, and asked the father to free a sheep that he considered faithful to the family. To consecrate the animal, the father washed his hands, making sure there was no trace of meat or blood. He then poured a bowl of

milk mixed in water on the animal and tied several strips of cloth to the animals' ear with white wool. Soon afterwards, Klu mo skyid recovered.

During Lo sar, people are particularly careful about encountering bad fortune, in fear it will pursue them the entire year. Villagers beginning new endeavors during Lo sar will be particularly upset if they encounter signs of bad fortune. For example:

Don grub (male, b. ~1975) was waiting by the road for the public bus when Mtsho mo passed by carrying an empty water container. Don grub and his family felt really angry that their enemy Mtsho mo had cursed Don grub's journey.

Unrelated to purity, but connected with the creation of good fortune, is the fact that during Lo sar, hosts will give their guests something to carry after leaving a house, such as a piece of fruit. This ensures that no-one will encounter people going about the village empty-handed, which would be bad fortune for the coming year.<sup>32</sup>

### Smon lam

Smon lam<sup>33</sup> is an important series of rituals held in Bla brang Monastery. They begin on the thirteenth day of the first month and finish on the sixteenth day.<sup>34</sup> *Gos sku* is held on

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<sup>32</sup> For a village-level description of Lo sar elsewhere in Amdo, see Tsering Bum et al. (2008).

<sup>33</sup> Translated as 'Praying festival' by the Tibetan Translation Tool (accessed 11 August 2008).

<sup>34</sup> Smon lam also refers to a specific form of chanting that monks begin performing on the afternoon of the third day of

the thirteenth day. *Gos sku* literally means 'silk image', but here refers to the displaying of a large *thang ka* on a mountain slope north of the monastery. On the fourteenth day, '*cham* 'masked religious dance' is held and *gtor ma* prepared by monks are discarded outside the monastery, accompanied by people known as *bo'u rgyag* firing guns. The *bo'u rgyag* all come from the *lha sde phyogs ba bzhi*, and wear their best clothes for the occasion, which must include a silk robe, *zhwa dmar* (a saucer-shaped hat fringed with red tassels), and *lham* 'traditional cloth shoes'. On the evening of the fifteenth, *me tog mchod mjal* is held. Butter sculptures depicting flowers, religious images, deities, and scenes of daily life are blessed by the *tshogs chen khri ba* 'abbot of the monastery' and are then worshipped by lay people. On the final day of Smon lam, a statue of Maitreya (Rje btsun byams pa mgon po) is taken from within the monastery and carried around the monastery, accompanied by performers dressed as a tiger, wild yak, and snow lion, as well as an *a tsa ra* (an acrobatic 'clown' who carries a baton). Smon lam attracts visitors from throughout Amdo and is a good chance to *shom ston pa* or display one's self in one's best clothes and ornaments.

Smon lam connotes good wishes for the future. For example, when local people visit the monastery or meet monks, they usually say "*Smon lam 'debs!*" to offer good wishes to the monks. The purpose of Smon lam is to create good fortune for the coming year for all sentient beings, and for individuals who make offerings during the festival. People not attending Smon lam feel uncomfortable about the coming year.

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the New Year, and continues every afternoon until the sixteenth day, but especially on the fourteenth, when Smon lam is chanted the entire day.

## Drug pa'i ma Ni

Phug sde villagers gather in a large tent to chant *oM ma Ni pad+me hUM* from the third until the ninth days of the sixth lunar month. During the seven days<sup>35</sup> of the ritual, participants do not eat meat, garlic, and onions; they also abstain from such foods on the thirteenth and fifteenth days of the month. Pieces of wood resembling arrows are placed in the *lab rtse* during the time villagers hold *shing gling* 'picnic'.

The Drug pa'i ma Ni festival brings good fortune since it is thought to bring abundant harvest and ensure the health of livestock. Similarly, not holding the ritual brings bad fortune. Five families manage the ritual, cooking such pure white foods as butter, grain, and milk porridge, and offering them to participants. By not participating, any one of the families can create bad fortune as exemplified in the following account:

One village family refused to participate in this ritual in 2003 because the husband had left the wife and married another woman. All the villagers said that this was really bad for the village, but it was especially bad luck for that family. The five days of Drug pa'i ma Ni are just like the five fingers of a person's hand. If one family does not join, the Drug pa'i ma Ni is just like a person missing a finger. Soon after that family refused to participate in the festival, one of their sons was hit by a car and lost a leg (male, b. ~1950).

During the Drug pa'i ma Ni, good fortune is mostly brought about through the chanting (pure speech) done by the villagers. However, in order to assure this, the purity of all

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<sup>35</sup> As with the water offerings in the family shrine, seven here is thought to be an auspicious number.

participants is important; villagers are not allowed to eat meat, garlic, and onion, which are considered unclean and all villagers stay in a large tent where they eat and chant together. Any misbehavior during Drug pa'i ma Ni may create immediate negative consequences for the village and for specific families, as demonstrated in the following accounts:

Grog pa (male, b. ~1979) and Ja phrug (male, b. ~1976) quarreled about their field boundaries in 2000 during Drug pa'i ma Ni. Afterwards, the rows of butter lamps on the altar fell to the ground and a storm came, destroying Phug sde Village's crops. Their impure behavior brought misfortune.

Two children destroyed Phug sde Village's *ser tho*<sup>36</sup> during Drug pa'i ma Ni in 2007. A huge storm struck the village and a flash flood washed away livestock and fields. Villagers thought that this misfortune was created by the impure behavior of the two children.

### The Life Cycle

Several life-cycle rituals are held by Phug sde villagers. The first is a set of birth rituals; then at the age of three, children have a hair cutting ritual; at the age of around seventeen, young women have Skra phab (hair taming); next is marriage (though not everyone marries: some people become monks or nuns, others remain lay and single); people who reach the age of eighty have a ritual known as Brgyad cu'i gya ston; and funeral rituals are held for all villagers.

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<sup>36</sup> The *ser tho* is an effigy protecting village crops from destruction by hail. For a photograph from a Tibetan village in Qinghai, see Snying bo rgyal and Rino (2008:22).

In association with births, fires are lit outside the family gate. The time when this fire is lit varies. If a woman is ill before giving birth, she is confined and does not meet guests who may bring harmful influences; fires are lit from the beginning of her confinement to purify any pollution arising from guests. If she is not confined, fires are lit starting immediately after the birth, explained by the local saying "*Mi gtsang na lam mi gtsang* The person is pure but the road is not pure." This expresses the belief that even pure people may be accidentally contaminated by impure things, therefore unwittingly creating bad consequences. The fire is made from sheep and yak dung and kindling. It needs to smolder enough to produce smoke, which purifies guests when they step over it. The greater the distance travelled, the greater the chance of encountering pollution, and therefore the greater the need for purification. This is expressed by the saying, "*Mi rngul rta rngul can* A person's sweat; a horse's sweat"; these are the outward signs of having made a long journey, and indicate that there is a greater chance of having encountered pollution. Special care must be taken in such instances.

Prior to a ceremony held for Phug sde Village children at the age of three,<sup>37</sup> they are considered weak and vulnerable, and at risk of being affected by negative influences. This ceremony marks the transition to a more mature stage, when the child is less vulnerable. Nonetheless, the child still needs protection, such as this ritual provides. Firstly, the child's hair is cut. Males have all their hair shaved except for a forelock, while females have the lower back of their head shaved; the hair on the crown is braided into two braids. Two small cowry shells are placed at the end of the braids. If the sons are healthier than the daughters in a family

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<sup>37</sup> This can sometimes be done at two years of age, or one hundred days after birth.



then both boys and girls have their heads shaved like boys. If the daughters are healthier (though this is less common), the boys have their hair prepared like a girl's. The discarded hair is rolled into a ball, a small bell is attached to it, and this is sewed to the back of a new shirt. The child wears this for a month or so afterward as protection from evil.

At around the age of seventeen (although this can also happen at the ages of thirteen and fifteen) girls hold the Skra phab ritual, usually on the third day of the New Year. Skra phab literally means 'hair taming'; the verb *phab* 'to tame' is also used in other circumstances such as *rta phab pa* 'taming a horse'. The Skra phab ritual 'tames' the woman and changes her from an uncontrolled girl into an obedient, mature woman. After holding Skra phab, a girl is permanently considered an adult, and villagers gossip if she acts immaturely. However, the change in status is not marked by significant change in her immediate work and responsibilities; she is still under her family's control. Although she is told that she is now adult and can make her own decisions, in actuality it will be many years before she has that choice. The ritual involves preparing new clothes and ornaments for the girl (especially a *ra ba* 'hair ornament') and braiding the girl's hair. She then tours the village, holds parties, and *shom ston pa* 'promenades' in Bla brang Town. Hair taming rituals were held for males in the past, but are no longer held.<sup>38</sup>

After taming the hair, the next significant life-cycle ritual is the *gnyen ston* 'wedding'. It is important to choose an auspicious time for the wedding, which is usually on the fifth day of the New Year. The family marrying off the child holds a farewell party, and the family accepting a new member holds a welcoming party. However, in Phug sde Village, these parties are not always held. Some families

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed description of such rituals elsewhere in A mdo, see Tshe dpal rdo rje et al. (2010).

consider it bad luck to hold one or the other party, or they simply cannot afford a party, particularly if a family has many children marrying out. A family holding either party invites all villagers and relatives, no matter how far away they live. The bride's representatives (brothers and uncles, but not her father) go to the bride's future home with her, and give speeches encouraging the groom and his parents to care for her. The groom's female relatives sing to comfort the bride and encourage the bride's family to not worry about her new family. After singing, the bride's representatives give some money to the village women in gratitude for their promise to care for their niece or sister. Then the representatives return to their original homes, leaving the bride with the groom's family. Village youths then sing folksongs and drink all night.

After the wedding ritual, the remainder of villagers' lives are devoid of life-cycle rituals, until they reach the age of eighty when *Brgyad cu'i gya ston* is held in celebration of the person's longevity. Villagers bring gifts for the elder, who gives them candies or fruits in return, symbolizing the elders' bestowing good health and longevity on their guests. The guests sing, dance, eat, and drink. The family holding the ritual offers a tea brick to each village household.<sup>39</sup>

The final life-cycle ritual is the '*das mchod* 'funeral'. If a person dies within the village territory, the corpse remains in the home for three, five, or seven days. If a person dies in a hospital or elsewhere outside the village territory, the corpse is not returned to the village, for this is considered bad luck.<sup>40</sup> The family invites monks from *Bla brang*

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<sup>39</sup> For monograph-length, village-level descriptions of weddings elsewhere in Amdo, see Blo brtan rdo rje and Stuart (2008) and Tshe dbang rdo rje et al. (2010).

<sup>40</sup> If a person dies in fields near the village, the corpse is kept in the home, but the corpse of a person who dies further

Monastery to chant over the corpse during this time. When the body is taken from the village for cremation, it cannot be taken above the village, it must be taken below.<sup>41</sup> The corpse is bound in a sitting position with white cloth and *phrug* 'felt', and carried out late at night or in the early hours of the morning (e.g., two a.m.) on six to eight poles, arranged like a wheel's spoke; the corpse sits in the center. One or two men hold each pole as women stand in lines, sing *ma Ni*, and hold smoldering incense sticks. If a family is worried about negative influence from the deceased, they covertly place an upside-down basket above their gate as protection. Immediate family members and other close relatives do not wash their hair or clothes and do not wear any jewelry for at least forty-nine days after a person's death; washing and wearing fine clothes and ornaments are taken as signs of leisure and pleasure, and indicate that the relatives are not in mourning. This may even be prolonged for up to one year.

Among life-cycle rituals, the hair-cutting rituals, *Skra phab*, marriage, and *Brgyad cu'i gya ston* create good fortune.

The hair-cutting ritual creates good fortune thought to protect the person throughout their entire life, but especially during childhood. The scissors used in this ritual should be owned by the family; people never use scissors from a hairdresser. Shears used for shearing livestock are also acceptable. The scissors and clothes are purified with *shug bdug*.

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away from the village, but within village territory in the pastures, is kept in a tent within the village territory but not near village homes.

<sup>41</sup> The village is built on a slope extending upwards on two sides of a valley and is divided into upper, middle, and lower sections depending on the position relative to the village's *ma Ni khang*, which defines the village center.

The primary aim of the Skra phab is to create good fortune that will accompany a woman throughout her life. Moreover, not holding this ritual creates misfortunes for a family, as described below:

Some bad thing, often a death, happens in a family that does not hold *skra phab*. For example, a village girl (b. 1986) did not hold this ritual in 2002. Her family had four daughters, so her parents decided to not hold this ritual again. Her father soon passed away. All the villagers believed that his death was caused by the bad fortune created by not holding the ritual. In another case, a village girl (b. 1990) turned seventeen but decided to not hold this ritual because she thought that it would be arrogant to do so. Shortly after, her grandfather passed away. The villagers also said that this was caused by the bad fortune from not holding the ritual.

The condition for purity in this ritual is met in several ways to ensure good fortune. First, all ornaments and clothes prepared for the girl to wear in the ritual are new. No black clothing is worn. Moreover, the woman who braids the girl's hair, or who begins the braiding, should be pure: she must not be a widow or divorced, she must have successful children, she and her family should have a good reputation, and she must have good relations with other villagers. This woman also helps the girl to put on her shirt (right arm first), belt, and hat.<sup>42</sup> When visiting other village homes, the girl first visits a family home located above her own, where she is offered pale milk tea to drink in a bowl with white wool

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<sup>42</sup> Generally, the right hand is considered purer than the left, which is referred to as *dgra lag* 'enemy hand'. Left-handed children's parents try to train the child so the right hand is dominant.

tied around the rim. Visiting those considered socially higher, eating white food, and using white wool all create purity ensuring good fortune. Snow on this day is also good fortune for the girl and her family. Borrowing ornaments and expensive clothes is bad fortune, because these borrowed things are considered unclean.

Concerns with purity are displayed in the arrangement of marriages, with the aim of ensuring good fortune for the future couple. Phug sde villagers pay close attention to the prospective partners' *rus pa* 'bones' and *bse dri*, epitomized in the local saying, "*Pha lo'i rus pa gser/ Ma lo'i rus pa dung*" meaning that the father's bone is gold, and the mother's is conch shell. Bad body odor inherited from the father is difficult to remove because it is fixed in bone and blood. If the bad smell is inherited from the mother, it is in the skin and easier to remove.

A second important factor concerning purity and weddings is the *the'u rang*. Most villagers cannot see *the'u rang*, but believe they exist. There are two kinds: *yod the'u* (which make a family rich) and *med the'u* (which make a family poor). Families do not marry into families who have *the'u rang*, because they are considered unclean. A village man (b. ~1950) provided the following account:

In the past, if a family bought a nice horse and a person from a *the'u rang* family thought it was a good horse, the horse immediately died. In this way, people knew if someone's family possessed *the'u rang*. If a visitor comes, and milk or yogurt suddenly explode from their containers, this further indicates that the visitor is from a family possessing *the'u rang*. Some people can actually see *the'u rang*, but most cannot. Those who see *the'u rang* are very special, though people disagree if such people are good or bad. *The'u rang* are supposed to look like cats and are always busy at harvest time. People who can see *the'u*

*rang* say that *the'u rang* steal peoples' harvest and take it to their master's home. *The'u rang* justify this by saying that they take away things from lazy people, but cannot take anything from hardworking people. I met a *the'u rang* when I was a child when I slept at my friend's house. When everyone was asleep, in the middle of the night, a cat bit me on the foot. I tried to kick it away, but it was so hard and heavy that I couldn't move it. I called to my friend, and suddenly the cat vanished.

Brgyad cu'i gya ston creates good fortune for the family in general, rather than for a specific person. In particular, this ritual creates good fortune for younger family members, imbuing them with good health and longevity. Purity is not of primary concern during Brgyad cu'i gya ston, but the following may be noted: the person being celebrated should wear new, white clothes; attendants should be careful to use pure speech; and finally, milk tea and yogurt, being white foods, are considered appropriate pure foods to offer on such occasions.

Rituals associated with birth and death are concerned with avoiding bad fortune. The many proscriptions associated with death prevent the deceased person from causing bad fortune for the family. Similarly, the proscriptions associated with birth prevent malicious forces from harming the new-born. Additionally, a rainbow, rain, and snow at the time of birth are considered fortuitous signs, indicating that the newborn will have a bright future.

Those who assist a woman give birth must be considered clean; they should have children and a husband, and not have experienced misfortune. For at least seven days and at most one month after a woman gives birth, family members cannot go outside at night or in the evening, as this increases the chance of meeting polluting forces that threaten the household's purity. If a person needs to go to the toilet,

the family puts a fire of pine needles in front of the door, which is also done when distant relatives or strangers visit. These guests are purified by stepping over this fire. New clothes worn by the child are also thought to be pure and to protect the child. If an entirely new outfit cannot be obtained, then at least the shirt should be new.

Unfamiliar relatives from far away are not welcomed when a baby is born in a family, as shown in the following account:

Within two weeks of my (female, b. 1985) niece's birth in 1996, all the villagers were having a picnic. My mother brought the new-born infant to the grassland in the morning. My niece was very happy and comfortable. A relative, who lives a hundred kilometers away, came to visit my family at lunchtime. She rode a black horse that was very tired and dripped sweat. As soon as that relative visited my family tent, my niece suddenly cried as if somebody was beating her. Villagers believed that even though our relative was clean, the long path she took must have been unclean and, as a consequence, bad fortune was created. The relative immediately returned home. Because the baby continued to cry and act lethargic, my father took her to a famous local lama and asked for advice. The lama said that the relative had come along an unclean path. Many monks came to my home, chanted, and did religious rituals. My niece once again became very energetic and stopped crying within three days.

Death involves considerable *grib* and precautions are made to maintain purity. In particular, the village community stands to be negatively affected by impurity, as does the deceased in *bar do*.<sup>43</sup> The first precaution to maintain purity

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<sup>43</sup> Skorupski and Cech (1984:5) state that, from a 'Buddhist' perspective, 'Tibetan' funerals are entirely concerned with

for the community is not to bring back the corpses of those who have died outside the village. Secondly, the corpse may not be carried above the village because this would pollute all village households. To ensure purity for the deceased, the body is tied with a white cloth in a sitting position before being taken for cremation. Lamas are also consulted for the purest method of dealing with the corpse<sup>44</sup> because mistakes bring misfortune to the family or the village. Prior to this, monks chant over the corpse. This is considered especially helpful if there are visible wounds. Chanting 'closes the wounds' on the deceased's 'body' traveling in *bar do*. Finally, family members refrain from washing, which demonstrates to other villagers their purity of mind; cleaning the physical body shows little concern for the deceased and suggests an impure mind.

## CONCLUSION

Phug sde Village Tibetans are concerned for their own personal well-being and prosperity, as well as that of their family and community. Such concerns motivate them to perform daily, life-cycle, and annual rituals that manipulate the future by engaging and creating such forces are *g.yang* 'potency', *bsod nams* 'merit', *bkra shis* 'auspiciousness', *rlung rta* 'reputation', *las* 'luck', *dge ba* 'virtue', and *rten 'brel* 'fortune'.

We have examined certain ways villagers perform rituals to create good *rten 'brel* and avoid bad *rten 'brel*.

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"purification, elimination of sins and guiding the dead person through the state of *bar do* and helping him to regain a better rebirth, or even, if possible, Buddhahood."

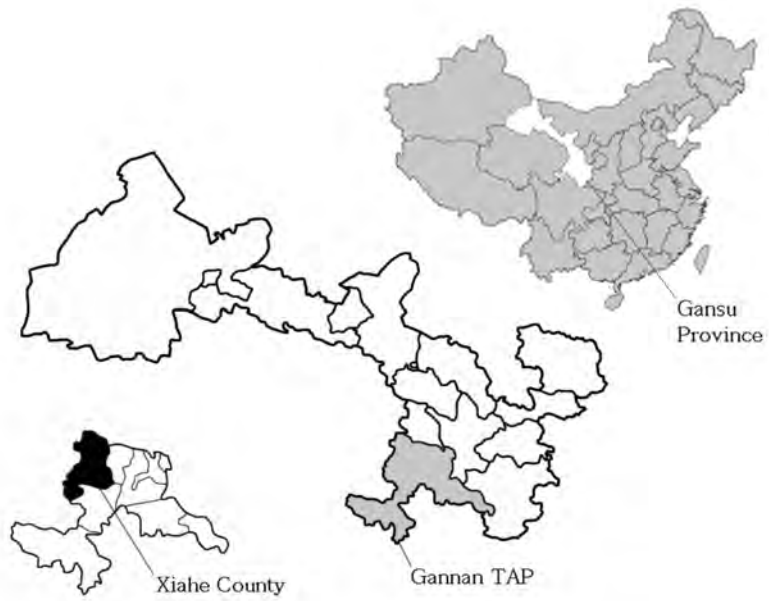
<sup>44</sup> Sky burial (cutting up the corpse and feeding it to vultures) and cremation are common.



Daily rituals create good *rten 'brel* for individuals and their families. Annual rituals create good *rten 'brel* for the village, the wider *lha sde gshog ka bzhi* community, and for the family during Lo sar. The hair-cutting ritual, Skra phab, marriage, and Brgya cu'i cha ston all create good fortune, whereas rituals associated with birth and death are concerned with avoiding bad fortune. Hair-cutting, Skra phab, marriage, Brgya cu'i cha ston, and birth rituals focus on individuals. Funerals focus on the village community.

Ensuring *gtsang ma* (purity or cleanliness) is of vital importance in the rituals and failure to ensure purity results in failed ritual, the most extreme consequence of which is death.

APPENDIX ONE: XIAHE COUNTY<sup>45</sup>



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<sup>45</sup> TAP = Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

APPENDIX TWO: PHUG SDE VILLAGE,  
ADMINISTRATIVE TOWNS, AND TOWNSHIPS IN  
XIAHE COUNTY



### APPENDIX THREE: OTHER ANNUAL RITUALS IN PHUG SDE

Tshogs mchod is held on the eighth day of the second lunar month, at Bla brang Monastery. Villagers (mostly from the *lha sde gshog ka bzhi*) visit the monastery, where such treasures as elephant tusks, 'horse horns', and 'dragon teeth' are displayed. Lay people hope beholding these treasures will bring good fortune to their livestock and crops in the coming year. Three weeks later, on the twenty-ninth day of the second lunar month, *sngags pa* (tantrins) from Bla brang Monastery's tantric college hold '*gu drag*. During '*gu drag*, *sngags pa* chant and consecrate water, which they spray on the faces of lay people. This is believed to relieve headaches, hearing ailments, and other minor problems associated with the face and head.

Crop sowing in Phug sde Village begins in the middle of the third lunar month by a locally respected family. Afterwards, all the families begin sowing their fields individually.

Starting on the fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month, villagers perform a three-day fast—Smyung gnas. On the first day, all participants eat a meal together in the village *ma Ni khang*, provided by a *sbyin bdag* 'donor'. Afterwards, participants cannot eat; they may only drink milk tea at dinner. Participants cannot eat, drink, or speak on the second day. On the third day, participants eat wheat porridge in the morning and then the ritual ends. The ritual's purpose is to generate compassion for animals, and for all beings who suffer hunger.

On the ninth day of the fifth lunar month, Phug sde Village males go to the *lab rtse* of the village's *skyes lha* to renew it by adding new arrows.

Rig sgra is held on the eighth day of the seventh lunar month. During Rig sgra, a '*cham* is held at Bla brang

Monastery, commemorating Milarepa's conversion of a hunter, dog, and deer to Buddhism.

On the twenty-second day of the eighth lunar month, villagers fast as they did in the fourth lunar month. One week later, on the twenty-ninth day, Dgun 'cham (winter 'cham) is held at the monastery.

Phug sde villagers visit Bla brang Monastery to commemorate the death of Tsong kha pa on the twenty-fifth day of the tenth lunar month. They light butter lamps in the temples and burn *bsang*. Local people consider this a lucky day to die, for the deceased will be reborn into Lha yul (realm of the gods) and there is no chance of them being reborn into Dmyal ba (Hell).

Nyi ldog 'winter solstice' is celebrated during the eleventh lunar month, though the exact date changes yearly. Parents bring their children to circumambulate the monastery on this day in the hope that as the days are becoming longer, so will their children's lifespan increase.

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## NON-ENGLISH WORD LIST

'Bor ra འབོར་ར, \*place

'cham འཆམ, masked monastic dances

'das mchod འདས་མཆོད, funeral

'gu drag འགྲུ་དྲག, water consecration ritual

### A

A mchog ཨ་མཚོག, \*place

A pha shi ཨ་ཕ་ཤེ, dead father – an insult/ curse

a tsa ra ཨ་ཙ་ར, clown, acrobat

### B

Bang sgar thang བང་སྐར་ཐང, \*place

bar do བར་དོ, the realm between life and death

bdun tshar བདུན་ཚར, offering of seven bowls of water

bkra shis བརྒྱ་ཤེས, auspicious

Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil ལྷ་བྲང་བརྒྱ་ཤེས་འཁྱིལ, \*monastery

bo'u rgyag བོའུ་རྒྱག, gun firing

Brgyad cu'i gya ston བརྒྱཅད་ཅུའི་གྱེ་སྟོན, \*ritual

Bsang khog བསང་ཁོག, \*place

bsang khri བསང་ཁྲི, incense altar

bsang yig བསང་ཡིག, incense scripture

bsang བསང, incense, fragrant offering

bse dri བསེ་དྲི, bad body odor

bsod nams བསོད་ནམས, merit, karmic storage

bsur བསུར, offering for souls wandering in Bar do

bsur phud sa བསུར་ཕུད་ས, a one meter high post used only to  
offer bsur

C

*chab* ཆབ, honorific form for water (*chu*), used when water is  
being used as an offering

*chu sna rgya mo yar la mchod* ལྷ་སྐྱ་ལྷ་མོ་ཡར་ལ་མཆོད, offering  
up the water's head

Chu sngon ལྷ་སྒོན, \*place

*chu* ལྷ, water

D

Dgar sde དག་སྡེ, \*place

*dge ba* དགེ་བ, virtue

*dgra lag* དག་ལག, 'enemy hand', left hand

*dgu thug* དགུ་ཐུག, nine noodles, the meal eaten on New Year's  
Eve

Dmar thang དམར་ཐང, \*place

Dmyal ba དམྱལ་བ, Hell, purgatory

Don grub འོན་གུབ, \*personal name

*dri bzal* འྲི་བཟལ, 'smell eater', beings that subsist on smells  
rather than food

*du ba* 'phyag pa དུ་བ་འཕྱག་པ, 'sweeping smoke', the cleaning  
done prior to the New Year

G

*g.yang* 'bod གཡང་འབོད, potency calling

*g.yang* གཡང་, potency

*gang* གང, full

Gannan 甘南, \*place

Gansu 甘肃, \*place

Glas sgrigs གླས་སྒྲིགས, \*place

Glu rgyags ལུ་རྒྱམས, \*place

Glu thang ལུ་ཐང, \*place

*gnyen ston* གཉེན་སྟོན་, wedding celebration

*Gos sku* གོས་སྐུ, \*ritual

*gral dag* གྲལ་དག, neat, tidy

*Grib* གྲིབ, pollution, defilement

*Grog pa* གྲོག་པ, \*personal name

*gter kha* གཏེར་ཁ, 'treasure bag' thrown into holy lakes to  
bring fortune

*gtor ma* གཏོར་མ, dough effigy, discarded to avoid misfortune

*gtsang ma* གཙང་མ, pure, clean

*gzhi bdag* གཞི་བདག, a 'smell eater', territorial deity

## H

Han 汉 China's majority ethnic group

Hezuo 合作 \*place

Hui 回 Chinese Muslims; one of China's fifty-six officially  
recognized Chinese ethnic groups

## J

Ja phrug ཇཤུག, \*place

## K

*kha btags* ཁ་བཏགས, ceremonial silk scarf

*kha dbur chag na kha mgo bde* ཁ་དབུར་ཆག་ན་ཁ་མགོ་བདེ, if the  
rim is broken, the body will be healthy

*Kho tshe* ཁོ་ཚེ, \*place

*Klu mo skyid* ལྷ་མོ་སྦྱིད, \*personal name

*klu* ལྷ, water deities

## L

*lab rtse* ལའ་རྩེ, mountain deity worship site

*Lam zhur* ལམ་ཞུར, \*place

*Lang kar thang* ལང་ཀར་ཐང, \*place

Lanzhou 兰州, \*place

*las* ལས, luck, karma

*lha sde gshog ka bzhi* ལྷ་སྡེ་གཤོག་ཀ་བཞི monastic villages of  
the four direction', the lay community associated with  
Bla brang bkra shis 'khyil

*lham* ལྷམ, traditional Tibetan boots

Linxia 临夏 \*place

Lo sar ལོ་སར, \*ritual

*Lo sar bzang* ལོ་སར་བཟང, Happy New Year

M

*ma Ni khang* མ་ཉི་ཁང, village chanting hall

*mchod pa bshams* མཚོད་པ་བཤམས, single water offering

Mda' smad མདའ་སྦྱད, \*place

*me skyogs* མེ་སྟོགས, ladle used to add fuel (e.g., dried dung) to  
a fire

*me tog mchod mjal* མེ་ཏོག་མཚོད་མཇལ, offering of butter  
sculptures

*med the'u* མེད་ཐེའུ, a familial spirit that engenders poverty

Mgon po མགོན་པོ, \*personal name

*mi gtsang na lam mi gtsang* མི་གཙང་ན་ལམ་མི་གཙང, the person  
is pure but the road is not pure

*mi gtsang pa* མི་གཙང་པ, unclean, impure

*mi rngul rta rngul can* མི་རྩལ་རྟ་རྩལ་ཅན, a person's sweat, a  
horse's sweat

Mngon mchog མངོན་མཚོག, \*place

Mtha ba gong ma མཐ་བ་གོང་མ, \*place

Mtha ba zhol ma མཐ་བ་ཞོལ་མ, \*place

Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ, \*personal name

*mu* ུམ unit of area measurement

Mun nag མུན་ནག, \*place

N

Nyi ldog ཉི་ལྷོག, \*ritual

nyin nag ཉིན་ནག, 'black day', an inauspicious, unlucky day

O

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཉི་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ, Buddhist mantra

P

pha bzang pas bzhon ma mi bzho/ ma bzang mas mtshon cha

mi 'dzin བ་བཟང་པོས་བཞོན་མ་མི་བཞོ། མ་བཟང་མོས་མཚོན་ཆ་

མི་འཛིན།, a good man never milks and a good woman

never fires a rifle

pha lo'i rus pa gser/ Ma lo'i rus pa dung བ་ལོའི་རུས་པ་གསེར། མ་

ལོའི་རུས་པ་དུང།, father's bone is gold, and the mother's

is conch shell

phab ཕབ, to tame

phrug ཕུག, felt

Phug sde ཕུག་སྡེ, \*place

Q

Qinghai 青海

Qinghai Normal University 青海师范大学

R

ra ba ར་བ, hair ornament

rde'u 'bum རྟེན་འབྲུམ, pile of protective, auspicious stones

Rgan rgya གན་རྒྱ, \*place

Rig sgra རིག་སྒྲ, \*ritual

Rka grong ཀ་གྲོང, \*place

rlung rta རླུང་རྟ, reputation, luck

rta phab pa རྟ་ཕབ་པ, tame a horse

rten 'brel bzang po རྟེན་འབྲེལ་བཟང་པོ, good fortune

rten 'brel ngan pa རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ངན་པ, misfortune

*rten 'brel* རྟེན་འབྲེལ, fortune

*rus pa* རུས་པ, bones, lineage

S

Sa dkar ས་དཀར, \*place

Sa mtsho skyid ས་མཚོ་སྐྱིད, \*personal name

*sbags* སྒགས, defiled, dirtied

*sbyin bdag* སྐྱིན་བདག, donor

*ser tho* སེར་ཐོ, hail prevention effigy

Sgrol ma སྐྱོལ་མ, \*personal name

Sgyus tshang སྐུས་ཚང, \*place

*shing gling* ཤིང་གླིང་, picnic

*shom ston pa* ཤོམ་སྟོན་པ, to promenade

*shug bdug* ཤུག་བདུག, household purification ritual

Skra phab སྐྱེལ་པ, \*ritual

Skyabs 'gro སྐྱམས་འགོ, \*scripture

*skyes lha* སྐྱེས་ལྷ, natal deity

Sman dkar སྐྱུན་དཀར, \*place

Smon lam སྐྱོན་ལམ, \*ritual

*smon lam 'debs* སྐྱོན་ལམ་འདེབས, best wishes

*sngags pa* སྔགས་པ, tantrin

*srung ma* སྤྱང་མ, household protective deity

*stong ba thams cad gang ba zer* སྟོང་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་གང་བ་ཟེར,  
empty containers will soon be full

T

Thang dkar nang ཐང་དཀར་ནང, \*place

*thang ka* ཐང་ཀ, cloth religious icon

Thang nag ཐང་ནག, \*place

*the'u rang* ཐེའུ་རང, familial spirit

Tsa yas ཅ་ཡས, \*place

*tsam pa* རྩམ་པ, roasted barely flour, roasted barley flour  
dough

*tshe ring lo brgya* ཚེ་རིང་ལོ་བརྒྱ, one hundred years of long life

Tshe sgron ཚེ་སྒོན, \*personal name

*tshe thar* ཚེ་ཐར, consecrated animal

*tshe thar ra ba* ཚེ་ཐར་ར་བ, courtyard for consecrating animals

*tshogs chen khri ba* ཚོགས་ཆེན་ཁྲི་བ, abbot of the monastery

*tshwa tshwa* ཚྭ་ཚྭ, stamped clay Buddhist images

Tsong kha pa རྩོག་ཁ་པ, \*personal name

X

Xiahe 夏河, \*place

*xiang* 乡 township

Y

*yag pa* ཡག་པ, beautiful

Yar ru rgyud ཡར་རུ་རྒྱུད, \*place

*yod the'u* ཡོད་ཐེ་འུ, familial spirit that bestows wealth

Z

Za yus ཟེ་ཡུས, \*place

Zhen 镇 town

Zhongzhuan 中专 technical school

*zhwa dmar* རྩ་དམར, red hat

RGYAS BZANG TIBETAN TRIBE HUNTING LORE

Bkra shis dpal 'bar (Independent Scholar)<sup>1</sup>

ABSTRACT

The Yul shul (Yushu) Rgyas bzang Tribe historically possessed a rich hunting tradition. Wildlife was hunted for food and other animal products. By 2007, hunting culture had diminished due to improvements in living conditions, wildlife protection laws, greater state control of wildlife product skin market and gun ownership, animal diseases, and the absence of such wildlife as wild yaks in local areas.

KEY WORDS

hunting, hunting dogs, Rgyas bzang Tribe, wildlife, Yul shul, Yushu

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Smith, George Schaller, Daniel Miller, and Kunchok Gelek made helpful comments on this paper. Whatever mistakes remain are the author's responsibility.



## EDITORS' NOTES

A preliminary investigation of the literature reveals a dearth of material on hunting in Tibetan society. Huber (2004) provides the only site-specific description of traditional hunting knowledge and practices. Huber (2003) also provides details of the development of Tibetan hunting laws and Huber and Pederson (1997) give a general introduction to Tibetan traditional ecological knowledge, which includes hunting lore, using meteorological knowledge as an example. Ekvall (1968) provides a general description of hunting among the nomads of the Mgo log region, and also discusses the role of dogs in A mdo pastoral communities (1963), including their role in hunting. Richardson (1990) provides a description of hunting accidents from early textual sources on Tibetan history.

The current lack of information emphasizes the value of this study in filling a lacuna in knowledge of Tibetan hunting practices and knowledge. Moreover, this study, to our knowledge, is the only English-language account of hunting by a Tibetan author.

## CONSULTANTS

- Rnam rgyal tshe 'phel (b. 1951) is a native of Bde chen Administrative Community (see below) and worked in the Rong po Town government in 2005.<sup>2</sup> He is a former hunter and provided information about local hunting, especially related to guns.
- Sher dga' (b. 1944) was a herder in 2005 in Bde chen Administrative Community. A former hunter, he provided

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<sup>2</sup> Field research for this article was undertaken by the author in 2004 and 2005.

information about hunting and hunting dogs.

- Lha rgyal (b. 1949) is a native of the Rgyas bzang Tribe and a former hunter. He was retired from government service in 2005 and provided information about hunting and guns.
- Yed yag (b. 1973) was a herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and had hunted with hunting dogs.
- Tshe ring phun tshogs (b. 1943) has lived in the Rgyas bzang tribal area all his life, worked for the local government in 2005, and provided information about local history.
- Che yag (b. 1946) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and provided information about local history.
- Rnam skro (b. 1924) was a monk at Rgyas bzang Monastery in 2004 and provided information about local history.
- Tshe ring (b. 1979) was a native herder in Rkyang chen Administrative Community in 2004. He provided information about contemporary hunting among Rgyas bzang tribesmen.
- Rgo rgyod (b. 1940) was a herder in Rkyang chen in 2004 and provided information about local history. He was the last person bearing the original clan's name, Rgo rgyod.
- Bzang po (b. 1983) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005. A hunting dog

enthusiast, he provided information about contemporary local hunting.

- Stobs rgyal (b. 1970) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and provided local proverbs related to hunting.
- Tshe dbang lha srung (b. 1943) was a local businessman in Rkyang chen Administrative Community in 2004 and provided information about the Tibetan mastiff business.

### THE RGYAS BZANG TRIBE

The Rgyas bzang Tribe has historically resided in a herding area along the upper reaches of the 'Bru chu (Yangtze, Changjiang) River in the southwest of Yul shul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China. It is located approximately seventy-five kilometers west of Skye dgu mdo (Jiegu), the prefecture capital. In the early twenty-first century, Rgyas bzang tribespeople lived in Rgyas rong (Jielong) Township, which has since been reclassified as Rong po (Longbao) Town.<sup>3</sup>

In 2005, the Rgyas bzang Tribe had a population of approximately 700 households in the three administrative communities (*dadui*) of Bde chen, Bya nya, and Rkyang chen. Each community had three or four brigades (*she*). Additionally, Kha la khug lug (Sanbei yangchang) is a separate administrative village (*cun*), not included within the three administrative communities listed above, whose inhabitants belong to the Rgyas bzang Tribe.

According to local accounts, the Rgyas bzang Tribe grew from six large clans that gradually united. When

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<sup>3</sup> 'Rgyas rong' is derived from a combination of the names of the Rong po and Rgyas bzang tribes.

neighbor tribes invaded what is now Rgyas bzang territory, conflict ensued. Grwa'u Rin chen tshe ring, a senior official in Skye dgu mdo, gained considerable autonomy from the Nang chen King.<sup>4</sup> His territory consisted of eighteen tribal territories: the eight Dmar gsum villages; the six 'Gag la shor villages; the two Skye sku mda' seng villages; and the two Byang gi zur pa khag villages. Grwa'u Rin chen tshe ring enlisted Ma Bufang's<sup>5</sup> help and defeated the other tribes. Later, the clans united under the tribal leader, Rgyas bzang nor rgyam, hence the tribe's name. Rgyas bzang nor rgyam died during conflict in 1958.

The altitude of the area ranges between 3,500-4,500 meters above sea level. Most local people graze yaks, horses, sheep, and goats. The main sources of income are the sale of livestock and such animal products as meat, animal skins, milk, animal hair, butter, and dried cheese.

The local landscape is characterized by mountains, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. The origin of this area is encapsulated in this local account:

Long ago, there were two extremely knowledgeable monks. One was compassionate while the other was aggressive and selfish. When they became old and death drew near, the aggressive monk wished to be a giant animal in his next life, hoping to make humans suffer. The gentle monk thus wished to subdue the giant animal in his next life.

In time, both monks died and the aggressive monk was reborn as a furious giant fish. He held a magic jewel in

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<sup>4</sup> See Teichman (1922), Samuel (1993), and Gruschke (2004) for more on the Nang chen King.

<sup>5</sup> Ma Bufang (1903-1975) was a Linxia Muslim who ruled Qinghai under the auspices of the Nationalist government. Ma fled to Taiwan after defeat at the hands of the PLA in 1949.

his mouth from Gnyan rgyas Lake<sup>6</sup> and planned to leap into the Pacific Ocean to flood the world. When such wild animals as tigers, wolves, horses, and lynx heard this news, they chased him and tried to control him by surrounding him in the four directions, but this proved very difficult.

At that time, the other monk was reborn as a bird and flew from Bya shul khog<sup>7</sup> and landed in front of the giant fish. When the giant fish looked at the bird, he thought it was very odd because it had a small head and large body. Unable to control himself, he laughed and the jewel fell from his mouth and into the G.yu chu River.

The creatures mentioned in this story explain the names of local mountains: Fish Mountain and Tiger Nose Mountain in the west; Horse Nose Mountain in the east; Wolf Nose Mountain in the south, and Lynx Nose Mountain in the north. The G.yu chu River separates Bird Nose Mountain from Fish Mountain. This is described in folksong lyrics, including, for example:

Between Bird and Fish mountains,  
Father Rgyas bzang Tribe has become rich and happy.

Historically, local herders lived in black yak-hair tents and followed traditional patterns of transhumant pastoralism. Beginning in 1996, however, life changed dramatically with the implementation of new government grassland policies and the severest snowstorm in living memory.

Government policies began to be implemented that, in 2004, led local people to build houses, increase the

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<sup>6</sup> In Rab shul Township, Yul shul County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province.

<sup>7</sup> This location is twenty minutes by car or motorcycle from today's Skye dgu mdo Town.

amount of fencing, build yak shelters, plant barley for livestock, and divide the grassland between individual households. One outcome of grassland division has been increased conflict over land between families, villages, and tribes. The current situation engenders much dissatisfaction over boundaries, leading to disagreement and conflict. Fencing has also decreased the amount of rangeland available to such wildlife as blue sheep and Tibetan gazelles.

Snowstorms in 1996 greatly reduced livestock numbers. Additionally, local people traded livestock for motorcycles, vehicles, clothing, and food, further reducing livestock numbers. Disruption in the traditional pattern of herding created by the building of houses, land allocation, and overgrazing on land near homes, have contributed to a decrease in livestock quality and output. Many households have at least one motorcycle and certain households have motor vehicles.

Local avifauna includes vultures, eagles, buzzards, ravens, black-necked cranes, geese, gulls, and swallows. Mammals include wolves, brown bears, lynx, snow leopards, badgers, otters, Tibetan gazelles, musk deer, white-lipped deer, blue sheep, wild yaks, marmots, and otters.

Local herders distinguish mammals according to their teeth. Animals with both upper and lower sets of teeth, such as wolves, dogs, and horses, are considered improper to eat. Animals without upper teeth, such as Tibetan gazelles, blue sheep, and yaks are considered proper to eat. Certain wildlife is either extinct or nearly so. For example, local old men say they hunted wild yaks in the past while the author has never seen wild yaks in the local area.

## HUNTING HISTORY IN RGYAS BZANG

Rgyas bzang tribes-people maintain they have lived in the area where they now dwell for thirteen generations and,

historically, have always hunted; particularly poor people hunted to avoid starvation. Knives, horn traps, wooden traps, flintlock rifles, and hunting dogs were used to hunt marmots, Tibetan gazelles, and blue sheep. Elders said some men fought brown bears with only a knife, hoping to thrust the knife into the bear's heart when the bear stood on its hind legs. If the hunter missed, however, it was particularly dangerous. More difficult to hunt because of their speed were musk deer, white-lipped deer, and Tibetan gazelles, which were hunted with traps and hunting dogs.

A group of low-status men traditionally hunted marmots. The belongings of these wandering men were carried by dogs. Such families also had dogs especially adept at hunting marmots, called 'marmot dogs'. These dogs were not considered special, because it is thought that almost any dog can hunt marmots. Furthermore, these dogs were considered ugly because they were mottled—the back of the neck was spotted and the tail was white. Such dogs were thought to be slow and clumsy. Currently, local people disparage certain dogs by calling them 'marmot dogs'.

## HUNTING ACCOUNTS

### Account One (Bkra shis dpal 'bar)

My name is Bkra shis dpal 'bar. I was born in 1980 and am a student at Qinghai Normal University. I'm from Rong po Town, Yul shul County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. My dream as a child was to ride a splendid horse covered in a decorated Indian carpet and a gold saddle, to wear a spongy Tibetan lambskin robe, and to be followed by a hunting dog. This dream has since vanished along with traditional hunting culture.

I was born into Rgyas bzang Tribe by virtue of my mother's ancestry. My father is from the lower Rong po

Tribe, which is a neighbor of the Rgyas bzang Tribe. Grandfather was a chieftain. Unfortunately, he was killed and Grandmother imprisoned when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) arrived. At that time, my father somehow obtained some fresh mutton while many people were starving, and tried to visit his mother in prison. On the way he was told that she had died there. Afterward, Father served a local rich family by herding livestock, and then found a job as a horse herder with the local government. Local officers arranged his marriage.

Whenever I return to my home area, I notice people are talking about selling horses and what I mostly hear are noisy motorcycles in the street. It makes me sick. I haven't seen hunting dogs since I graduated from middle school. I ask myself, "Where have the hunting dogs all gone?" In the past, the street was full of colorful hunting dogs. People enjoyed looking at and talking about hunting dogs. Now, I sometimes cannot believe my eyes.

I asked Father about the hunting dogs. He said, "Hunting dogs have been killed. They are dead. People don't need them anymore. Our living conditions are improving."

I think he was right, but I cannot stop recalling my childhood with hunting dogs.

When I was eight, every household had at last one hunting dog that always sat by the door, poised and ready for its master's command. Usually one did not visit other families unless one was familiar with their hunting dogs, otherwise they might attack. We never tied up hunting dogs because it was good for them to practice running freely. Watchdogs are more aggressive and dangerous than hunting dogs, but most people who were injured by dogs were attacked by hunting dogs and a cross between a hunting dog and a watchdog. My family had seven dogs, most of which had been abandoned by other families. The dogs' food was such leftover animal products as lungs and



other internal organs. The number of our dogs increased every year. People passing by our gate needed to call to us to restrain the dogs.

My task in winter was to care for the bitches' rooms. I built cozy rooms of clods and covered the floor with dried powdered yak dung. I wished the pups to inherit the characteristics from my uncle's dog and was eager to see if the pups' color matched his color. Well known in my village for being able to catch fox on the grassland, he had a white line from his nose to his forehead and his left nostril had a white spot. He had a white chest and half of each of his front legs was white.

Sometimes I waited in front of the rooms until the mother had delivered them all. Sometimes it took a long time. The sun would move back to the mountain and then Father would yell for me to come to dinner. My mind was still with the dogs and the night was so long that I couldn't sleep well. Occasionally I dreamed of dogs until the murmur of Mother's prayers woke me in the morning. Immediately I got up and ran to the dog's room. When I found pups with features similar to the sire, it meant I had to watch them constantly to prevent them from being stolen by other villagers, keen to have good fox-hunting dogs.

My primary task at that time, which was not really my choice, was to study. I considered taking care of the dogs my real job and my parents tolerated this as long as I studied well. I had more than ten dogs each year. My cousins were charmed by the puppies. When they visited my family while they were on caravan, each cousin took one or two puppies with them. Sometimes I was unwilling to give up those pups, but my parents persuaded me to do so. Father always comforted me with, "You can have better puppies if you take good care of the bitches." When my cousins visited the next year, my first question was about my dogs. According to my cousins, my dogs were good

wolf dogs<sup>8</sup> and nimble hunters. They showed me some fox skin hats from fox hunted by my dogs, making me very proud of my dogs.

Once, one of my maternal uncle's family's sheep was attacked by wolves, and he asked me for a dog to fend off wolves. At the moment, I had no furious wolf dogs, only a mute pup. But he wanted it so I gave it to him. Two years later he thanked me because that wolf dog was a great help.

I loved taking care of dogs. Somehow they were my best friends. Other village boys were the same. Every boy had a hunting dog. Most we trained ourselves, with such simple commands as "Go!" and "Attack!" We rubbed butter on their ears so their ears would grow bigger, and controlled their food intake so they would be slim. We learned these training skills from such hunters as our fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. We trained the pups in our spare time. We didn't hunt often, because the pups were frightened when confronting wild beasts. To encourage them, we bumped their noses against each other to make them fight. Victory also brought prestige for their little masters.

I had a dog called 'Red Dog' when I was in Grade Four in primary school. He could fight well and was my best friend. One winter day after I had finished my classes and was starting home, I heard dogs' yelping, but the cold and heavy snow falling obscured my vision. I tried to move toward the commotion. The yells were from an old rundown building where I found several cruel boys beating innocent pups with dog beaters. Blood was everywhere. Some puppies were dead. Others lay on the ground, their legs shaking in pain. Others were trying to escape into the corners of the adobe house. I was shocked. I didn't know

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<sup>8</sup> A wolf dog protects sheep by going around the sheep both day and night, making it hard for wolves to attack.

whether I should stop the boys or let them continue. Those boys were known to be very violent. All the villagers despised them. Finally, I asked them to release the pups but they ignored me. When I bravely tried again, one boy angrily shouted "This is none of your business. My father told me to do this." Then he tossed a dog in front of me and shouted, "Take it home if you want it!" I picked up the dog and went home.

When Father discovered this dog, his face immediately turned red. He yelled, "What are you doing with this abandoned pup? Return it!" I tried to explain, but he ignored me. Finally I could only cry.

Mother then beseeched Father who, after drinking a cup of tea, agreed I could keep the dog. I appreciated my parents' compassion and wiped my tears away with my sleeves.

I mixed roasted barley flour with cool water for the dog to eat. His whole body shook when he ate and it was hard for him to stand. After finishing eating, his belly was round and he stretched his legs. I took him to our family yard where the other dogs lived and he made friends with them. Two or three days later he was fine, largely because of a sense of belonging with the other dogs.

He became brave and was the type of dog I liked to train to hunt. I fed and trained him. He fought a lot with outside dogs, so his ears and nose had big scars, but he never bit people. Gradually he began hunting rabbits, marmots, pikas, and Tibetan gazelles. I wanted to go far away by horse to hunt, but this dream never materialized because I had classes every day and my parents didn't like killing animals. I sometimes climbed mountains around my village and destroyed bird nests while my dog hunted.

My dog attacked a marmot one day. When some herders learned this, they teased me by saying, "Everybody's hunting dog is a blue sheep hunting dog, killing blue sheep on white rocky mountains, but your

hunting dog is a marmot hunting dog, killing marmots on the grassland."

This saying was created by Rdo rje,<sup>9</sup> of the Rgyas bzang Tribe, and hidden within those words was an unforgettable scandal. Villagers' living conditions were miserable when the Culture Revolution ended; most depended on hunting and begging. Weapons had been collected by the local government. Hunting dogs were the only thing people had to help them. People started to value and train hunting dogs. Some local people treated hunting dogs like their own children and a local man named Tshe ring<sup>10</sup> even treated hunting dogs better than his own family members. Every day he fed his dogs meat soup and meat that he never shared with his family. He loved hunting, but his dogs were dull and clumsy and could never catch blue sheep or Tibetan gazelles, so he hunted marmots and rabbits. He was proud of his hunting dogs and boasted about them. However, Rdo rje didn't like this and laughed at Tshe ring, improvising a saying, suggesting that a spot on Tshe ring's daughter's lip was inherited from one of the dogs, among other things.

Nowadays locals understand the background of these words as a demeaning joke, thus when people put this joke in my ears, I felt intensely ashamed and tried to stop my dog from hunting marmots. I never beat my dog for he gave me a joyful childhood. In winter my dog pulled me on the ice and I cut hair from his tail to make shuttlecocks. When summer came, he was a bodyguard, protecting me from strangers, especially when I went to dig caterpillar fungus.

An aged woman called and waved to me when I was on my way home one day. I thought she needed help. When I approached, I noticed that her eyes were full of

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<sup>9</sup> A fictitious name.

<sup>10</sup> A fictitious name.

tears. She spun her prayer-wheel quickly, said something I could not understand, and pointed to a hill, but I didn't see anything. Then she calmed down and told me that my dog had been killed. I didn't believe it. The picture in mind that afternoon was of going to school. My dog followed me a while, then returned home. I thought she must be hallucinating.

The kitchen was so silent when I got home that it seemed no living beings existed. My parents and sisters looked at me guiltily. Immediately I knew something was wrong with my dog and asked my mother where my dog was. She glanced at Father's face accusingly and replied, "Your father killed your dog on Fish Mountain."

Father said, "Your dog attacked our neighbor's sheep so..."

I didn't fully believe them until I saw the dog. I ran up the mountain in one breath and found him lying on the rocks. I tried to wake him, calling his name, but there was no reaction. I wept, hating Father. I knelt for half an hour. Then my sisters came and brought *byin rten*,<sup>11</sup> putting some on the dog's nose and mouth; then they took me back home. When I got home, I carved some *ma Ni*<sup>12</sup> on a stone. Father tried to explain and comfort me. He paid a *ma Ni* sculptor to make *khyi rdo*.<sup>13</sup> Two days later, I took the stones to the place where my dog died and put them on his head. When I gazed at his death ground, I saw vultures hovering. I prayed for him to have a good rebirth.

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<sup>11</sup> *Byin rten* = made of milk, water, and substances blessed by high lamas. It is used to help the deceased accumulate merit for their next reincarnation.

<sup>12</sup> *ma Ni* = Short for the six syllable mantra oM ma Ni pad+me hUM.

<sup>13</sup> Literally, 'dog stone'. *Khyi rdo* are stones on which mantra are carved for the deceased dog in order that it might be reborn as a human.

Account Two (Uncle Sher dga')

My name is Sher dga'. I'm from the Rgyas bzang Tribe. I'm sixty-one years old and all my life I've been a natural born killer. I killed every kind of animal that came into my sight. When I was little, around six or seven, my brother and I killed pika with string loops. We skinned the carcasses and made finger covers with the skins. Sometimes I stole Buddha images from home and put them far way; we used them as targets, and shot at them with toy guns. Eventually I was able to kill marmots with a slingshot. At that time, my family was rich and I considered hunting fun.

After the PLA arrived, my family's livelihood depended on hunting, but I didn't have a gun. Most of my hunting was done with hunting dogs. I had five dogs that included Tiger Spot, White Falcon, and Black Bird. They were as smart as humans and as fast as lightening.

Usually we hunted in groups of more than two people. Some people carried guns and others took hunting dogs. We hunted on certain mountains where blue sheep, Tibetan gazelles, and fox lived. However, some mountain deities are so powerful that hunters never dared shoot or to order hunting dogs to attack wildlife on their mountains. Before the sun rose above the mountain and when there was no fog, we divided into two groups and took different routes. Sometimes we simultaneously attacked from the back and the front of the mountain. Sometimes we attacked from both sides of the mountain. We waited until the wild animals came to graze and to enjoy the sunshine.

Once, my family moved to another area. Early one morning I went with my friend to a mountain to hunt with seven hunting dogs. When we made out some blue sheep, my friend took three dogs and stealthily moved to the side of the mountain while I ran up from the back of the rocky mountain, holding the other dogs close to me. When I came to the top of the rocky mountain and spotted the blue

sheep, so did my dogs. They jerked their ears and eyes, focusing intently on the blue sheep. I ordered, "Go!" and they immediately gave chase. Of course the blue sheep raced away, but my friend's dogs chased them up the front of the mountain. Then the blue sheep escaped down another very steep side of the rocky mountain. The hunting dogs chased them back and forth and finally cornered a group of blue sheep in a crevice, where the dogs couldn't reach them. They watched until my friend and I moved above the crevice. We threw rocks on the blue sheep's horns. When they fell, the dogs tore out their throats. We killed five blue sheep and brought their carcasses back home one by one. That night, my family and my friend's family had a tasty dinner.

### Account Three (Uncle Lha rgyal)

My name is Bsod nams lha rgyal. I'm fifty-six years old. I was born in a poor family. My parents died when I was a little boy and my two sisters and I were adopted by one of our aunts. When I was around eighteen, I joined the local militia and hunted wild animals with poor-quality 'seven-six-two' Chinese rifles. Eventually I got a good Chinese rifle. I could kill more than before and I supplied local people with meat. People always called me when they noticed such wild animals as blue sheep, Tibetan gazelles, musk deer, and white-lipped deer. I must have killed more than 500 wild animals. After a while, hunting became my profession. I loved it. Mostly I hunted with rifles. I didn't hunt with dogs, though I love them. Right now I have three Tibetan mastiffs and one blue sheep hunting dog, which my cousin gave me.

I became so ill once when I was out hunting that I could hardly mount my horse to return home. On the way, I heard stones rolling down the mountain. I jerked my head up and noticed a musk deer on a cliff. I was thinking about

shooting it, but I had lost all motivation. I slid off my horse, unslung my rifle, lay on the ground, and fired twice. The musk deer tumbled to the foot of the mountain. I took my horse close to the carcass, but I found the musk gland was split in two and was useless. I then tried to continue my journey by horse.

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM. I was such a hunter, until I got *phog thug*<sup>14</sup> and almost died. Then I swore in front of a lama that I would stop hunting. This is how it happened: In the winter, I went to hunt with my friend and I shot a male blue sheep so big I couldn't carry it. Then I thought maybe I could move it to a steep valley that had ice covering it from top to bottom, and slide it down. Anyway, I tried. I sat on the carcass and slid on it right to the foot of the mountain, leaving a trail of blood behind me; I couldn't have cared less and returned home. When I got home, I felt tired and lay on my bed. Suddenly a strange woman jumped on my chest. She sat on me, and I couldn't move; it was hard for me to breath. After a while she disappeared.

Afterwards, I became very sick, and remained that way for half a year. The woman was the mountain deity who punished me. I visited monasteries, held religious activities, and gradually recovered.

## GUNS

From 1930-1950, traditional flintlock rifles began to be replaced by rifles, which were called 'seven-nine' in Chinese. The flintlocks had a bayonet the 'seven-nine' lacked. At that time, only certain noble families and chieftains owned guns because guns were imported from inner China and India and

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<sup>14</sup> *Phog thug* = literally 'harm', but also suggests that one has angered the mountain deity, who has taken revenge by making one sick and hurting one's family and livestock.



were expensive.

Other than the high costs, local beliefs also presented obstacles to hunting. Chiefs and lamas urged the protection of wildlife for they were usually rich enough that hunting was unnecessary. Hunting was forbidden near monasteries and tribal chiefs' homes. Mountains abound in this area and monasteries are always near mountains. Hunting on mountains near a monastery was thought to anger mountain deities, cause hunters to be ill, reduce the quality of land, and increase the frequency of such natural disasters as snowstorms. Few people were positive about hunting. Secondly, Tibetan Buddhism explicitly proscribes killing.

With the arrival of the PLA in Khams areas, the local community's pattern of life totally changed. Livestock were collectivized, people's communes were established, and private property was abolished. In practical terms, all livestock were brought together and people were then placed in herding, milking, plowing, and other work-groups. People had less food and more work than ever before in living memory. In 2004, certain elders referred to this period as 'the black mushroom time', because local people consider black mushrooms inedible but they were, nevertheless, collected and eaten at that time.

The hunting group was followed by members of another work unit that rode yaks and collected the animals the hunters killed. A hunting group generally consisted of ten people on horseback. Each hunter had a 'seven-nine' gun and had a bullet budget: five bullets for a wild ass (kiang), seven for a white-lipped deer, three for a blue sheep, and two for a Tibetan gazelle. Hunters could take as many bullets as they wanted but were later required to account for fired bullets according to the number of the animals they had killed. Hunters had to report daily the results of their hunting to the local Communist Party. Secretly, local hunters hunted with dogs, metal traps, and local guns.

## ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Hunting provided food and such useful products as fox-skin hats; fox noses hung under saddles that were thought to protect against evils; Tibetan gazelle skins were used to make quilts for young children; and the skin of white-lipped deer was used to make bags, horse saddle covers, saddle blankets, and so on.<sup>15</sup>

White-lipped deer antlers are of two types. The white horn was used to make snuff boxes and 'blood horns' were used to make medicines, especially for joint complaints.

The skin of blue sheep was used as a decoration to patch the back of men's sheepskin robes. Wild ass leg skin was used to make cruppers attached to a saddle.<sup>16</sup>

Badger skin was used to make doctors' medicine bags. A piece of badger skin hung from a horse's neck was thought to protect against gossip.<sup>17</sup>

Brown bearskin was used to make bed sheets for the elderly. Brown bears are of two types: 'fire bear', and 'water bear'. The former are red and their gallbladders and paws are believed to be particularly potent medicines.

Musk deer provided musk for medicine and the flesh of the female musk deer provided meat for human consumption.<sup>18</sup>

Rabbit tails were used to clean the stone mills in which medicines were ground, which was thought to increase the efficacy of the medicine.

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<sup>15</sup> The skin of the white-lipped deer is considered waterproof and soft.

<sup>16</sup> The crupper from the back of the saddle under the horse's tail.

<sup>17</sup> Bkra shis dpal 'bar saw a piece of badger skin hung around a dog's neck in 2004 in Skye dgu Town.

<sup>18</sup> Male musk deer meat was sometimes eaten, however, it was usually avoided because of its strong smell.

Otter and snow leopard provided skins to decorate Tibetan robes, and snow leopard bones provided medicine. These two species have always been rare.

Wild yaks provided skins used to make traditional Tibetan boots and leather bags, and also provided meat that was eaten.

## HUNTING DOGS

Livestock were divided among individuals in about 1962. At that time, most people had hunting dogs, seven-nine guns, and traps. Dogs were considered very important in hunting and every family had at least one hunting dog. The following lines were used by local hunters to describe hunting dogs:

- An upper body as round as a ball, a lower body as straight as a stick, like a stick joined to a ball, a body as smooth and flexible as a fish.
- If the tail reaches the back leg joint it indicates it can catch a distant fox (run very fast).
- The toes should be tight and large to climb rocky mountains.
- A stupa standing atop the skull; a stupa standing alone is best.<sup>19</sup>
- The ears should be as large and thin as a wing so as to easily hear its master's voice nine valleys and nine mountains away.
- The tail should be long and thin, like the lasso of the

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<sup>19</sup> This describes the dog's cranial crest.

### King of Hell.

- If the ends of its ears can reach the fangs, blue sheep can be caught on cliffs.
- Short front legs are good for running up mountains.
- A long body is good for steep winding ways.<sup>20</sup>

Local hunters distinguished three types of hunting dogs. The first was the blue sheep hunting dog with a strong build and tight, thick toes that prevented broken stones and thorns from getting caught when running on rocky mountains. The hair was thick to keep the dog warm at high altitudes. The second type was the fox-hunting dog that was faster and smaller than the blue sheep hunting dog. Tibetan antelope hunting dogs were smallest, had a smooth coat, and were swift runners. Hunters put the Tibetan antelope hunting dog in their robes and when antelope were encountered, the hunting dogs leapt out through the sleeve and gave chase.

The following names of hunting dogs describe their appearance and color: white lipped bear cub, eaglet, female eagle, female Tibetan antelope, white Tibetan antelope, white Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan gazelle fawn, lion cub, white eagle, baby falcon, white flyer, jumping Tibetan gazelle, white falcon, jumping eagle, falcon, and tiger spot.

## HUNTING TABOOS

Taboos involved guns, hunting units, hunting locations, deceased hunters, and quarry.

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<sup>20</sup> At times, one side of a path is higher than the other. These are often winding paths. A long body is thought to be helpful in negotiating such paths.

Hunters took care to ensure that guns remained undefiled. A gun touched by a pregnant woman, for example, was considered to be polluted and would not shoot well.

Hunters chose hunting companions carefully. Certain companions increased one's luck and were chosen on the basis of experience gained from previous hunting trips. Some men worked well together and could kill many animals, while others who joined the hunting party were notably unsuccessful.

Certain mountains were hunted on because their mountain deity did not harm people, while other mountain deities were very dangerous. Hunting on the latter mountains brought the risk of diseases striking the hunter's family or being struck by lightning. Torrential rains might fall locally or in extreme cases, the whole region might experience natural disasters (cf. Huber and Pedersen 1997). In the territory of strict mountain deities, hunters might not be able to aim at their quarry, or the target might turn into a monk or woman.

A dead hunter's name was not mentioned because the hunter's soul remained in the area where he hunted; sometimes he could be heard calling his hunting dogs. Black eagles and black dogs were considered bad luck and shooting them was taboo.

## HUNTING METHODS

Fox were hunted using hunting dogs and by mixing mouse and pika poison in small balls of roasted barley flour mixed with tea. These balls were placed around foxholes. A second method involved blocking all the holes but one leading out of a fox den. The latter hole was then blocked with a stone and a fire was made nearby. Smoke was blown into the hole using goatskin bellows. After half an hour, the fox was usually found dead with its nose near the stone. A leather

rope was pushed in the hole and twisted in the hope that it would touch the fox and become tangled with the fox's fur or tail, and then the fox was pulled out.

A method utilized when there was only a single hole was to fill the hole with dirt and cover it with a large stone. The next day the fox would have moved the earth put in the hole away from the stone. This was repeated until the fox was forced to come to the hole's mouth, where it could be killed. Another method was to set traps near pika burrows because fox hunt pikas for food.

According to local people, brown bears live in caves on mountainsides. Hunters calculated when the bears would emerge from their winter dens and waited atop the dens with a large, heavy cleaver normally used for chopping bones. When the bear emerged, the hunter struck the bear's forehead, which is considered the most vulnerable part of the bear's body, and might have been able to kill two bears from one den. Sometimes, hunters shot into the dens in winter to rouse hibernating bears and shot them when they emerged from the dens.

In summer, mindful that injured bears attack humans, hunters planned carefully when hunting brown bears. Hunters were also careful to avoid being in a position that would allow the wind to carry their scent to bears. Local people considered brown bears to be as smart as humans. If a brown bear smelled a human, it might put a piece of dried yak dung on its head, stand, and wave in order to resemble a human and lure the person. When it rained, brown bears might walk on the grassland to hunt marmots. If a hunter spotted a brown bear doing this, he hid in a safe place and then aimed his rifle at the bear's forehead, spine, or between the front legs and the stomach. According to local hunters, each bear needed to be shot with at least twenty to forty bullets by a 'Chinese rifle', because brown bear skin is very tough. Sometimes bullets could not penetrate the skin.

When hunting otter, a small channel along a

riverbank where footprints or droppings had been discovered was made. The end of the channel was blocked in one of the following shapes:  $\Omega$  or  $\cap$ . When the otter entered this trap, the hunters blocked the opening and killed the otter with stones or sticks. Otters were also shot when they came up on the riverbank.

Brave hunters killed snow leopards with sticks. Such hunters wrapped their arms with thick wool material. When a snow leopard attacked, the hunter then beat its head. Another method was to grab the tail when it attacked lambs or goats tied in a tent in winter. Rgam tshe witnessed 'Jam dpal from Bde chen Administrative Community fight a snow leopard and later take the pelt to Rgyas rong Township Town.

Blue sheep, musk deer, and white-lipped deer all graze in the morning and afternoon and thus were hunted at these times with hunting dogs. If blue sheep were spotted, the hunter held the hunting dogs by the back of their necks and then at the right time, pointed to the sheep and said, "Go!" The dogs gave immediate chase. When the blue sheep scattered, the dogs focused on one small group, biting the back of their legs. When a sheep turned from the pain, the dogs lunged for the throat and held on until the sheep died.

When blue sheep escaped into a steep crevice and the dogs were unable to reach them, the dogs surrounded the hiding place, preventing escape. Hunters then might have climbed above the crevice and tossed large stones onto the sheep's heads. Dogs attacked sheep that fell from the crevice. Hunters also tied stones on either end of a leather rope and threw them around the horns of blue sheep, which eventually made the blue sheep trip and fall. Certain hunters lassooed blue sheep and then killed them.

Hunting dogs played a central role in hunting strategies that did not require rifles.

With the introduction of rifles, large male blue sheep became the main targets because the meat is considered tasty. Hunters aimed at the blue sheep's backbone, between the

back legs and stomach, and the neck bone. Hunters tried for a single shot that would incapacitate or kill the animal outright. An animal that escaped while injured might have been impossible to locate.

Wild yaks were typically killed with rifles.

When wolves attacked such livestock as sheep, yaks, horses, and goats, people killed the wolves by putting traps near their caves or with guns, but did not eat wolves' flesh nor use the skins. According to local beliefs, wolves cannot be killed because they are watchdogs of a local protector goddess. Consequently, there is reluctance to discuss hunting wolves.<sup>21</sup>

Traps were used in places where Tibetan gazelle habitually dug holes with their feet. Similarly, traps were put in locations where male musk deer habitually rubbed their tails against rocks or trees.<sup>22</sup>

People frequently moved during the Cultural Revolution and killed wildlife to survive because there were too few livestock to provide families with food and the government provided weapons to local people for hunting.

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<sup>21</sup> See Karma-Dondrub (2005:26-29) for an account of trapping and skinning a living wolf in Yul shul, setting the wolf free, and a subsequent religious ritual to appease the local deity; Tsering Bum (2007:88-89) for an account of eating wolf meat and its value as a tonic; and Mgon po tshe ring (2010) for a description of a ritual performed in 1999 in Brag 'go during which a man, his son, and his nephew visited some villages with a wolf skin and asked for donations to appease the 'owner of the wolves'.

<sup>22</sup> Local informants said that the tail of the male musk deer is frequently swollen and suffers from a skin disease, making it itchy; the deer hence rub their tails against trees.



## CONCLUSION

Traditional culture experienced a revival in the 1980s. However, religious beliefs, improving living conditions which meant people no longer needed wild animal meat, government policies outlawing hunting, and fewer markets for wild animal products all combined to ensure that traditional hunting practices were not part of that revival. In 2005, environmental protection policies and the confiscation of guns further diminished hunting culture. The market for such animal products as skins, gallbladders, milk, butter, and cheese were controlled primarily by Han and Muslims who imported tiger skins, leopard skins, and fox skins from Pakistan, India, Turkey, and from within Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces in China. Trade of animal skins within Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province was permitted by the government and Tibetan merchants bought animal skins from these areas for resale to Tibetan customers.

Hunting dogs had mostly disappeared by 2005, but Tibetan mastiffs were very popular. Almost every family tried to have at least one Tibetan mastiff that might have been sold for great profit.<sup>23</sup> According to local businessmen, Tibetan mastiffs are one of the world's oldest purebred dogs and originate from the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding Himalayan regions. People described Tibetan mastiffs as lions, leopards, and bears, but considered them to be close friends because they protect family property and livestock.

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<sup>23</sup> By 2008 however, abandoned, starving dogs roamed the streets of Yul shul Prefecture Town. Buyers for dogs were few and prices had plummeted. Dogs had also been abandoned in the wild, where some hunted wildlife. Others had been abandoned near monasteries.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'Bri chu འབྲི་ཆུ། river's name

'Gag la shor འགག་ལ་ཤོར། place name

'Jam dpal འཇམ་དཔལ། person's name

A

A mdo ཨ་མདོ། place name

B

Bde chen བདེ་ཆེན། Administrative Community

Bkra shis dpal 'bar བརྒ་ཤིས་དཔལ་འབར། person's name

Bsod nams lha rgyal བསོད་ནམས་ལྷ་རྒྱལ། person's name

Bya nya ཐུ་ཉ། Administrative Community

Bya shul khog ཐུ་ཤུལ་ཁོག། place name

Byang gi zur pa khag ཐུང་གི་བུར་པ་ཁག། place name

byin rten ཐིན་རྟེན། sacred substances used to help the  
deceased accumulate merit for their next  
reincarnation

Bzang po བཟང་པོ། person's name

C

Che yag ཆེ་ཡག། person's name

cun 村། village

D

dadui 大队། administrative unit

Dmar gsum དམར་གསུམ། place name

G

G.yu chu གཡུ་ཆུ། river's name

Gansu 甘肃 Province

Gnyan rgyas, གཉན་རྒྱལ། a lake

Grwa'u Rin chen tshe ring གྲའུ་རིན་ཆེན་ཆོ་རིང་། person's name

H

Han 汉 Chinese

Heilongjiang 黑龙江 Province

Hui 回; Muslim ethnic group in China

J

Jiegu 结古; place name

Jielong 结隆 Township

Jilin 吉林 Province

K

Kha la khug lug ཁ་ལ་ཁུག་ལུག (Sanbei yangchang 三北羊厂);  
place name

*khyi rdo* ཁྱི་རྡོ་; stones on which mantra are carved for a  
deceased dog in order that it might be reborn as a  
human

L

Lha rgyal ལྷ་རྒྱལ་; person's name

Liaoning 辽宁 Province

Linxia 临夏; place name

Longbao 隆宝 Town

M

Ma Bufang 马步芳; person's name

*ma Ni* མ་ཉི་; Buddhist Sanskrit chant

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག་; Guoluo 果洛; place name

N

Nang chen རང་ཅེན་; Nangqian 囊谦; place name

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཉི་པད་མེ་ཧཱུཾ་; Buddhist chant

P

*phog thug* ཕོག་ཐུག་; literally 'harm', but also suggests that one  
has angered the mountain deity, who has taken  
revenge by making one sick and hurting one's family  
and livestock

Q

Qinghai 青海 Province

R

Rab shul རབ་ཤུལ།; place name

Rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།; person's name

Rgam tshe རྒམ་མེ།; person's name

Rgo rgyod རོ་རྟོད།; person's name

Rgyas bzang རྒྱལ་བཟང་།; tribe and place name

Rgyas bzang nor rgyam རྒྱལ་བཟང་ནོར་རྒྱམ།; person's name

Rgyas rong རྒྱལ་རོང་།; place name

Rkyang chen རྒྱང་ཆེན།; place name

Rnam rgyal tshe 'phel རྣམ་རྒྱལ་མེ་འཕེལ།; person's name

Rong po རོང་པོ།; place name

S

Sanbei yangchang 三北羊厂; place name

Shaanxi 陕西

she 社; administrative unit

Sher dga' ཤེར་དགའ།; person's name

Skye dgu mdo རྟེ་དགུ་མདོ།; place name

Skye sku mda' seng རྟེ་སྐུ་མདའ་སེང་།; place name

Stobs rgyal སྟོབས་རྒྱལ།; person's name

T

Tshe dbang lha srung མེ་དབང་ལྷ་སྤུང་།; person's name

Tshe ring མེ་རིང་།; person's name

Tshe ring phun tshogs མེ་རིང་ཕུན་ཚོགས།; person's name

Y

Yangtze (Changjiang 长江) River

Yed yag ཡེད་ཡག།; person's name

Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།; place name

Yushu 玉树; place name



*sa.bə*: A TIBETAN RITE OF PASSAGE

Lhundrom (Lhun 'grub; Tunzhi 吞智; Qinghai Normal University)

ABSTRACT

dze.ne Village residents practice the *sa.bə* ritual that announces the coming-of-age and likely marriage of a young couple.

KEY WORDS

Ganzi, Luhuo, marriage, rites of passage, Tibetan marriage



## INTRODUCTION

dze.ne (Brag mda', Zhangda) Tibetan Village, Nyin mo (Yimu) Township, Brag 'go (Luhou) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province is eight kilometers east of Brag 'go County Town (Xindu) and about 500 kilometers from Chengdu City, the provincial capital.

In the context of dze.ne Village, *sa.bə*<sup>1</sup> refers to a young couple staying for three days in the home of a relative as part of the marriage process and, in most cases, after negotiation between the couple's relatives, it leads to marriage.

Seven accounts illustrating the details of enactment (or ignoring) of *sa.bə* follow. Account One describes a couple whose parents arranged their marriage; Account Two describes a couple who knew each other and wished to marry; Account Three concerns a couple who held *sa.bə* without informing their parents and had a child before their formal wedding; Account Four is of a couple who wished to marry but the couple's families could not reach agreement consequently, no marriage was held; Account Five concerns a couple whose marriage was arranged by their parents; Account Six presents a case where *sa.bə* was not observed; and Account Seven illustrates a case of matchmaking.

After the accounts, to better understand the context in which *sa.bə* occurs, we examine the village's location, language, and economy; provide a map illustrating the village's location; discuss village lineages; and describe the village moral code, matchmaking, and planning for *sa.bə*.

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<sup>1</sup> IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet) is used to record words spoken in the local language used in dze.ne Village, Wylie is used to transcribe Tibetan, and Chinese is written in *pinyin*. A list of all non-English words in appropriate scripts is given at the end of this paper.

*sa.bə* ACCOUNTS<sup>2</sup>

Account One

I was sleeping with Father one late winter night in 1998 under two quilts atop a Tibetan carpet placed on straw on the floor in the family sitting room. Someone called Father's name. I didn't know who it was exactly and I was worried because it was so late.

Father got up, immediately went outside, and returned about ten minutes later with Thub bstan, a neighbor, who was wearing a new Tibetan robe, and a person with an unfamiliar face. Later I realized she was Chos sgron, who I didn't see very often because she was from the First Brigade. We lived in the Second Brigade. She was also wearing a new Tibetan robe. Father took them to our guest room where they slept together that night.

I noticed Father was gone the next morning when I got up for breakfast and entered our kitchen. When I asked, I was told that he had gone to see Thub bstan's parents. Our two guests got up also. I was shy when I saw them because I was barefoot and only wearing underwear.

Chos sgron was very much a stranger to me and my older brother, older sister, and younger sister. Breakfast was usually accompanied by much laughter and chatting, but this day was unusual because everybody was quiet. My sister and I gawked at the girl, which offended Mother so much that she scowled at us angrily. Father returned as we were about to finish breakfast, and reported that he had informed our guests' parents that they were staying in our home. I expected them to say something in reply but they were silent.

Chos sgron and Thub bstan didn't talk to each

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<sup>2</sup> Lhundrom provided all the accounts based on personal experience and what fellow villagers told him.

other during the day; they seemed like strangers.

Father finished breakfast and left again because Thub bstan's parents wanted him to participate in the ensuing negotiations. After breakfast, Thub bstan said that he would make a wooden toy gun for me, so my older brother and I took him out to the courtyard. My sisters and mother chatted with Chos sgron. I didn't know what they talked about. The day passed without excitement. I guess I was expecting something new; the arrival of a young couple didn't usually happen. Chos sgron and Thub bstan didn't even so much as look at each other. They didn't seem to be lovers.

We took Thub bstan outside our home courtyard the next morning. Father had a bicycle and Thub bstan taught us how to ride it. Chos sgron helped with the family chores. Father came home late that night. I was in bed when he arrived. When Mother came and asked how the negotiations had gone, he replied, "It was decided they will live in Chos sgron's home because she is the only one in her family who can remain at home to take care of her parents and maintain the family inheritance." The next day, my family prepared a generous lunch of steamed dumplings stuffed with pork, soup made from beef boiled with wheat grain, potatoes cooked in butter, twisted bread sticks fried in canola oil, and candies bought from the village shop. During the meal, Father told Chos sgron and Thub bstan that their parents had agreed to the marriage.

Father escorted them to Chos sgron's home early the next morning. Thub bstan returned to his home three days later and then visited my family with a bottle of home-made barley liquor for Father, to thank us for letting them stay in our home.

## Account Two

Bde skyid<sup>3</sup> (b. ~1983) is from the village and married a village man (b. ~1982) when she was twenty-two. They had known each other since they were children. They left the village to undertake migrant labor and then were able to form a steady relationship. After a few years they decided to marry. However, in fear of their parents rejecting the marriage, they decided to observe *sa.bə* secretly.

One winter night about two months before the New Year<sup>4</sup> in 2004, Bde skyid told her parents that she was going to stay at her maternal uncle's<sup>5</sup> home for the night. Her parents believed this because staying at a relative's home for a night is common. When she reached her

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<sup>3</sup> A fictitious name.

<sup>4</sup> In village elders' memory, Brag 'go County Monastery (Brag 'go dga' ldan rabs rten rnam par rgyal pa'i gling) announced the date of the first day of the New Year. This changed in about 1959 with the Chinese lunar calendar and Gregorian calendars becoming more important. Villagers were eventually pleased with this because, beginning in about 1995, most families had televisions and enjoyed watching the programs featuring singing and dancing shows broadcast during the Chinese lunar New Year period. In 2006, Brag 'go County Monastery urged observing the New Year according to the Tibetan calendar, which resulted in villagers celebrating New Year twice. The discrepancy between the two calendars created few problems during the fifteen days of New Year celebration, except for the very first day in 2006 when boys and men visited the local mountain deity altar on the first day according to both the Chinese and Tibetan New Years. In 2007 and 2008, the Tibetan and Chinese New Years were on the same date and thus there were no such complications.

<sup>5</sup> Her mother's oldest brother.

uncle's home, she didn't speak of her real plan. At around one a.m., she quietly left the home and went to meet her boyfriend at the village *mani* stone pile as they had earlier agreed. Next, they then went to the boy's paternal uncle's home and stayed there for the night. The following day before daybreak, the male household head where they were staying informed the young couple's parents of their visit. The parents, in turn, informed all their relatives.

The parents and relatives of both sides then negotiated and decided that the couple would live in the boy's home after marriage. Bde skyid went to her boyfriend's home after *sa.bə*, stayed for three days, and then returned to her parents' home. Representatives of both sides later met again and discussed the actual wedding ceremony, which took place on the sixth day of the Tibetan New Year.

### Account Three

Shong lo (b. 1978), a native of Brag mda' Village and X's paternal uncle's oldest daughter, had a secret nomad boyfriend. One night when she was twenty-four, she took her boyfriend to her paternal aunt's home for *sa.bə*. The family was shocked and somewhat reluctant but, because it would have been very rude to refuse, the family provided accommodation.

Once the first night of *sa.bə* is observed, events proceed adhering to traditional, well-known procedures. The morning after their arrival, Sgrol lo, X's father's older sister, went to Shong lo's home with a bottle of homemade barley liquor. At an ensuing meeting attended by representatives of the families, it was decided that the nomad would live with the girl, but the actual wedding ceremony would be three years later.

The nomad returned to his home after *sa.bə*, which

was about an hour away by horseback, and did not visit Shong lo's family again until the actual wedding ceremony. Later, Shong lo gave birth to a baby girl, Mtsho sgrol, who ran about merrily in her new clothes during her parents' wedding ceremony. This was all received as though it was nothing out of the ordinary.

#### Account Four

Seng ge (b. 1985) took his girlfriend to his paternal aunt's home in June 2009 for *sa.bə*. All relatives were duly informed according to tradition, and a meeting attended by representatives of both sides was initiated. During the meeting, representatives disagreed on where the couple-to-be should live and related concerns. The girl's family wanted them to live with their family, and the boy's family wanted them to live with their family. They were unable to agree and, during the second round of negotiations, it was decided that no marriage would occur.

The girl's family accused the *sa.bə* family of wrongfully providing accommodation and demanded they pay compensation. The accusation was that she had been deceived by the boy and his relatives who had provided a home for *sa.bə*. However, these demands were dropped after two more *sa.bə* meetings between the two families.

#### Account Five

The *dze.ne* family of Sgrol ma (b. 1987) asked Dar rgyas's family to allow their son, Dpal Idan, to marry Sgrol ma in 2007. Dpal Idan's family agreed. On the twelfth night of the twelfth lunar month, they observed *sa.bə* shortly after Dpal Idan returned from logging work in Gzhi mda', bordering Daofu County. They went to Sgrol ma's paternal

grandfather's sister's home for *sa.bə*. Because both families had earlier agreed to the marriage, little further negotiation was needed. The couple remained at the *sa.bə* home for three days. Next, Dpal Idan went to Sgrol ma's home and stayed for three days, and then returned to his own home. Their formal wedding ritual was held on the ninth day of the first lunar month in 2008.

### Account Six

Nyi ma (b. 1974), a native of *dze.ne* Village, obtained an official job when he was twenty-four and then moved to the county seat, where he has lived since. He met a Tibetan girl there and was frequently with her. He brought the girl to his home during holidays. His family understood they were a couple because no one brings opposite-sex friends to their home unless they are lovers. After three years together, they decided to have a wedding ceremony (when he was twenty-eight). They did not observe *sa.bə*; instead, they sent invitation cards to relatives and held a wedding feast on the first floor of the Kangbei Hotel restaurant in the county seat.

### Account Seven

When X's wife's younger sister (b. 1990) was at the traditional age for marriage, her parents asked X to be her matchmaker. In a discussion attended by her parents and X and his wife, the parents openly shared their thoughts regarding who they preferred as a marriage partner for their daughter—X's cousin. X was confident about making the match, given his relationship with the prospective groom.

X talked to his cousin, who agreed but noted that

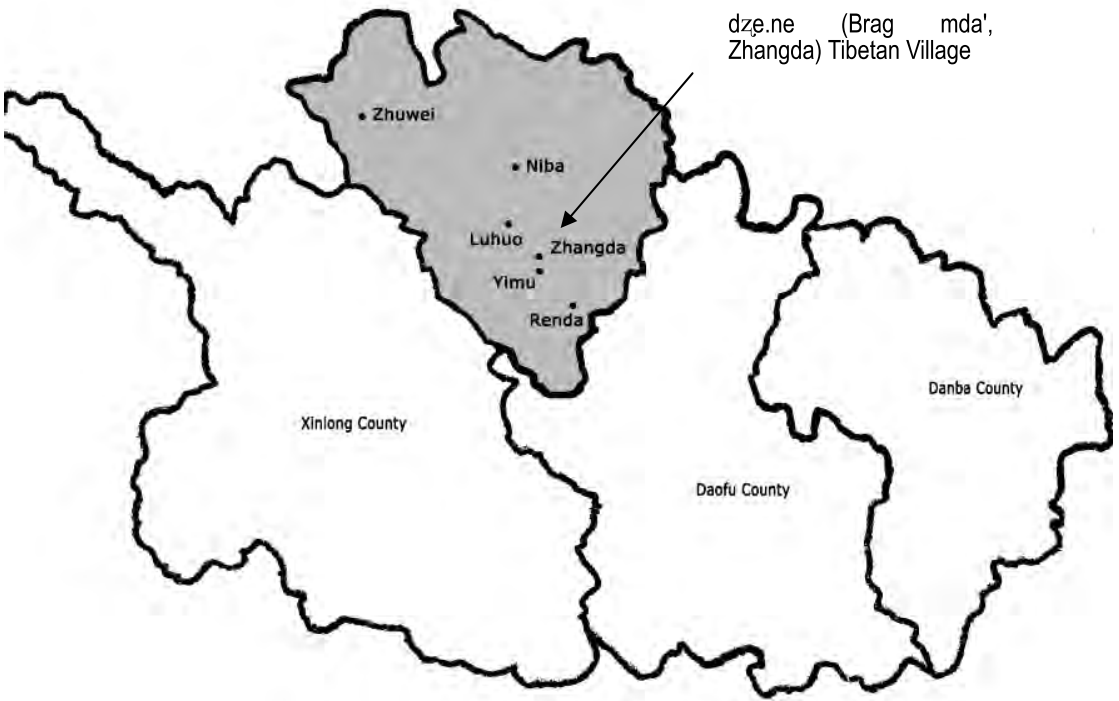
his parents would make the final decision. X then talked to his cousin's father and he agreed. Two weeks later, however, X again chatted with his uncle to further the plan and found that his uncle's wife disagreed on the grounds of a past unpleasant relationship. No marriage occurred.

## LOCATION, LANGUAGE, AND ECONOMY

Historically, dze.ne Village was relatively isolated, which impeded local economic growth in comparison to such neighboring communities as Sha ba thung (Xialatuo) while, simultaneously preserving local culture and language. In about 1960, a bridge was built over the xu.ru (Xianshui) River, which marks the southern border of dze.ne Village. The bridge, which is a twenty minute walk from the village, reduced the time required to reach the county town (the local market) on foot from about four hours to one hour. In 2008, a highway ran in front of the bridge to the county town, making it convenient to take buses that needed only twenty minutes to reach the county town. This was a significant improvement in market access for locals.



Figure One. Map of Brag 'go (Luhuo) County.



The 105 households (500 residents) are officially classified as Tibetan and are culturally Tibetan. However, they speak a Qiangic language that is not intelligible to nearby Tibetan language speakers. The literature has referred to the village language as Ergong, Dijiaohua 'Speech of the Ends of the Earth' (Luhuo Annals 2000: 425-426), Huoer, and Daofu yu 'Daofu language' (Duoerji 1997:3). Local Tibetans refer to the language impolitely as 'dre skad' 'Ghost Language', and more politely as 'Mi nya'. Local villagers refer to their language as dze.ne ske 'dze.ne language' and by the Tibetan term 'Mi nyag'. There is general agreement that the language belongs to the Qiangic branch of the Tibeto-Burman Language Family.

dze.ne villagers cultivate barley, peas, wheat, and

potatoes. An ample amount of rich, irrigated land serves as the base of subsistence, as well as providing cash income through sale of barley. Additional income is earned through work at road and building construction sites. Certain families have a home in the village and also send family members to the mountains to herd livestock year round.<sup>6</sup>

## LINEAGE

When a *dze.ne* villager is asked where they are from, and they reply:

*ŋa-ŋanga-və-to*  
I-our-person-BE<sup>7</sup>  
'I am a native person.'<sup>8</sup>

it indicates that they and their ancestors are originally from the village and belong to one of the seven indigenous families. In contrast, a person who answers:

*ŋa-kərmzi-və-to*  
I-Dkar mdzes<sup>9</sup>-person-BE  
'I am a Dkar mdzes (County) person.'<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A detailed introduction to the village is provided in Lhundrom et al. (forthcoming). For photographs of the village see :

- <http://picasaweb.google.com/Lhundrom/PhotosTakenInBragMdaVillageAnziTibetanAutonomousPrefecture#>
- <http://picasaweb.google.com/Lhundrom/DramdaTibetanVillageZhangguCountyGanziPrefectureSichuanChina#>.

<sup>7</sup> BE = 'be verb'.

<sup>8</sup> Nga sa cha 'di'i mi red.

<sup>9</sup> The name of a neighboring county.

<sup>10</sup> Nga dkar mdzes ba yin.

indicates that they or their ancestors are originally from Dkar mdzes County, even though they may have lived their entire lives in the village. Families tracing their lineage to outside the village are believed to be descended from, for example, traders and fugitives who settled in the village and then intermarried with locals. Ample arable land attracted outsiders, as did the location of xu.ru River, which was a major impediment for outsiders to reach the village (perhaps in pursuit of fugitives) without the help of locals and their *dzə* 'rafts', made by tying several logs together. The time required for outsiders to reach the village gave fugitives living in the village time to escape.

Rgyal lo (1929-2010), a village native, said all the village families are derived from twenty-six families, of which seven are indigenous local families because there are no accounts as to where their ancestors originated.

Parents believe that if their children live near each other they can assist each other with harvesting, funerals, weddings, and so on. Consequently, about seventy percent of marriages occur between villagers. Family lineage plays a significant role in determining a suitable marriage partner. Other factors include wealth, closeness of blood relationship, personality, and character. A local saying goes:

rmi-mari-sota-mc<sup>h</sup>ə-tə-çəve-ŋi-rə

name-NEG<sup>11</sup>-instead-outside-FU<sup>12</sup>-go-better-BE

'It is better to marry outside the village than marry a person  
from a nameless family.'

In this context, 'nameless family' might refer to, for example, a trader who settled in the village and married a poor local woman, or descendants of a pastoralist who fled to

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<sup>11</sup> Negative.

<sup>12</sup> Future tense.

the village to escape feuding in his natal homeland. Marrying blood-related relations (both paternal and maternal) within three-generations is taboo. Given the village's limited population, it is common for marriage partners to be fourth generation relatives.

## VILLAGE MORAL CODE

The village moral code dictates that girls retain their virginity until *sa.bə*.<sup>13</sup> To avoid gossip, unmarried teenage girls and young women should only associate with relatives and villagers. If villagers often see a girl with outsiders, they might say that she is *merəm* 'disobedient' and *jaməje* 'out of control'. A girl should be conservative and traditional, e.g., she should not stay out late at night, should not participate in such social gatherings as two-three day picnics on the nearby grassland, and should stay with her parents most of the time. Such local norms are examples of the criteria used to evaluate a girl's suitability as a potential marriage partner when a boy's parents search for a bride for their sons.

Sexual intercourse is not required during *sa.bə* and may not occur when the couple does not know each other well, as in the case of a marriage arranged by parents, e.g., Account Five. On the other hand, in the case of free-choice marriage, couples would likely have intercourse during *sa.bə* in the hope the girl will become pregnant, making their eventual marriage more difficult for their families to oppose, as illustrated in Account Two.

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<sup>13</sup> In contrast, there is little concern for or value placed on male virginity.

## MATCHMAKING AND MARRIAGE

When children reach marriageable age, parents discuss who is a good match for their child. Once they identify a potential spouse, a parent visits the potential spouse's home. If the family disagrees, a common polite rejection is "Our child is too young" or "We don't want them to marry so early." Disagreement might give rise to subsequent conflict; therefore, rejections of such requests are given very carefully.

Parents also consult a close relative with connections to both families to learn what the parents of the prospective spouse think. They might also ask a mutual relative to take a message because rejection, if it occurs, is less embarrassing. However, ninety percent of families agree when approached.

Matchmaking is preferable when the parents in search of a spouse lack confidence in negotiations with the parents of the prospective spouse and especially so when the latter is from a wealthy family. As illustrated in Account Seven, the family making the proposal chooses a matchmaker who is mutually connected to both families.

Most marriages are arranged and *sa.bə* is the most important component of a successful marriage. The planning begins with a meeting between the parents or family elders, who discuss where the future couple should live, and possible partners and their suitability for marriage. Once a likely candidate is identified, the focus is on how to initiate a meeting with the prospective spouse's family.

Parents wish to keep their most capable and obedient son at home to maintain the family lineage, as well as care for parents. This son then inherits all the family property. Parents arrange the marriage of their other children, who marry and either establish their own households or move to their spouse's parents' home to live. About half of the village young men move into their wives' homes and are referred to by a local term *mə.xa* (*mag pa*). The stigma often attached to being a *mag pa* in Tibetan societies is absent in *dze.ne*.

PLANNING *sa.bə*

Parents conceal marriage arrangements from the community in order to protect the family's reputation should negotiations fail, and in order to promote their children's reputations, as explained below. When the master of the *sa.bə* home informs the couple's families, the news spreads quickly through the village—*sa.bə* is a very public event. Because the parents of the couple have kept the marriage arrangement secret, most villagers have a sense that the young couple is thoughtful and considerate. They are seen as ideal children because they are ideally suited for each other—their parents searched for an ideal partner with the result that the couple is well-matched. The parents, on the other hand, appear to be model parents, because the arrangement was secret; certain villagers will believe that the couple chose each other without parental pressure. The parents thus epitomize models of parental responsibility and the children exemplify filiality.

Accounts Two, Three, and Four are examples of free-choice marriage with the couple concealing their *sa.bə* plans. A couple may be afraid that if their *sa.bə* plans are known, their parents will object. In such cases, the couple often chooses a place and time to meet, usually in the village late at night, and where to go for *sa.bə*. Most often, the boy takes the girl to one of his relative's homes. When they reach the gate of the relative's house late at night, they call to the family. When someone from the home hears, they get up, meet the caller, and immediately understand that this is a *sa.bə* couple. Tradition requires the family to offer accommodation and the couple is led to a room. For the next two days and two nights the couple lives with the family. They are not expected to do hard work; they may help with housework. The morning after their initial arrival, the male household head of the family where the couple is staying informs the couple's parents who, in turn, notify their network of relatives. These relatives then visit the new

couples' families with liquor.

The two families negotiate for the next two days. Each side invites an eloquent and experienced relative to participate in the negotiation that centers on where the couple will live and how well the couple will be cared for by the family with whom they will live. Once this is decided, the couple goes to the home where they will live together and stay for an additional three days. They may informally visit other relatives during this time.

## CONCLUSION

Most *sa.bə* lead to marriage, but not all, e.g., Account Four. If, for example, both families have a child at home to maintain the family lineage (e.g., one of their children has already married and lives with their spouse in the parent's home), they probably do not wish to have a second such couple live with them—it is almost never the case that a family has two children with their respective spouses living in the parents' home. The only choice in such a situation is for the *sa.bə* couple to establish their own home, which means to build a new house. However, this is too expensive for most village families and the marriage may be rejected.

In the case of arranged marriage, *sa.bə* announces the traditional form of marriage, indicating that they are now to be considered formally married and no longer available for further marriage consideration. For example, after *sa.bə*, it was expected that Dpal Idan (Account Five) no longer often associate with unmarried boys, stay outside his home very late, and spend much time with them chatting, making jokes, and drinking. This behavior is culturally acceptable for boys who have not observed *sa.bə*. Once Dpal Idan observed *sa.bə*, it was expected that he behave as a married man.

The traditional function of *sa.bə* in the case of arranged marriage is to notify the community of their

children's filiality, and not to provide time for the parents to negotiate the marriage, since both sets of parents have already agreed.

Arranged marriage may put the couple in an awkward situation because it is common for the couple to never have even chatted. As mentioned earlier, young people are outside of the village most of the year earning cash income and may know nothing of their marriage and parents' arrangement until they return home for New Year and shortly before their parents have scheduled *sa.bə*. The details may astonish them.

The day after the night of their arrival, their families and relatives are informed and people visit the concerned families. The bride and groom's families also meet but, as they have both agreed to the marriage, they discuss preparations for the coming wedding rather than negotiating over a possible marital solution. The couple goes to a home where they live in the future after *sa.bə* and remains there for three more days.

As Account Four illustrates, couples who observe *sa.bə* do not necessarily marry, however, the impact of observing *sa.bə* remains influential for the remainder of their lives, particularly for women.

*Sa.bə* is also observed in such nearby communities as Shwa ba thang, Gzhi mda', and Srib mo, where it is known by the same term.<sup>14</sup> Further research is needed to determine how *sa.bə* in those communities compares to what is practiced in dze.ne Village.

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<sup>14</sup> dze.ne ske was spoken in these communities in the recent past but those born after ~1980 can only understand fragments of the language and do not speak it at all.



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NON-ENGLISH TERMS<sup>15</sup>

B

Bde skyid བདེ་སྦྱིད་, di.scə

Brag 'go བྲག་འགོ་, ra.yu, Luhou 炉霍

Brag 'go dga' ldan rabs rten rnam par rgyal pa'i gling, བྲག་འགོ་  
དགའ་ལྷན་རབས་རྟེན་རྒྱལ་པའི་གླིང་།

Brag mda' བྲག་མདའ་, dze.ne, Zhangda 章达

C

Chengdu 成都, Khrin tu'u ཁྲིན་ཏུ་ཁུ།

Chos sgron, ཆོས་སྒྲོན།

D

Dar rgyas དར་རྒྱལ་, de.ci

Dijiaohua 地脚话

Dpa' ldan དཔའ་ལྷན་, pa.din

'dre skad འདྲེ་སྐད་, dzi.ske

E

Ergong 耳龚

G

Ganzi 甘孜, kərmzi, Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།

Gnas 'gro གནས་འགོ་

Gzhi mda' གཞི་མདའ་,

H

Han 汉, rja, Rgya ཁྱུ།

Huoer 霍尔语, Hor ཧོར།

J

*jaməne*

K

Kangbei 康北

kər.mzi, Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས།, Ganzi 甘孜

<sup>15</sup> The order of terms is the term given in the text, dze.ne ske (IPA), Wylie, Tibetan, *pinyin*, and Chinese characters.

L

lhə.nɔ̃, Lhun grub ལུན་གུབ།

M

mani, ma Ni མ་ཤི།

me.rəm, Ma rabs མ་རབས།

mə.xa, mag pa མག་པ།

Mi nyag མི་ཉག, mə.nə, Muya 木雅

N

Nga dkar mdzes ba yin ང་དཀར་མཛེས་བ་ཡིན།, ŋa-kə.rmzi-və-to

Nga sa cha 'di'i mi red ང་(ས་ཆ)འདིའི་མི་རེད།, ŋa-ŋanga-və-to

Nyi ma ཉི་མ།, ə.ma

Nyin mo ཉིན་མོ།, Yimu 宜木

R

Renda 人大, nə̃.mda,

Rgyal lo རྒྱལ་ལོ།, rje.lo

S

sa.bə

Seng ge སེང་གེ།, sin.ngi

Sgrol ma སྒྲོལ་མ།, ɔ̃o.ma

Sha ba thung, ɕa.ra.tʰon, ཤ་བ་ཐུང་།, Xialatuo 虾拉沱

Shong lo ཤོང་ལོ།, ɕon.lo

Sichuan 四川, si.ɕʰan, Si khron སི་ཁྲོན།

Srib mo སྲིབ་མོ།, Simu 斯木

stewu, Rta'u ཏུའུ།, Daofu 道孚

T

Thub bstan ཐུབ་བསྟན།, tʰə.sten

X

Xindu County Town, Xindu zhen 新都镇

xu.ru, Xianshui 鲜水

Y

Yizu 一组

## ESSAY



## MUULASAN MONGGHUL

### Limusishiden

Limusishiden (Li Dechun 李得春) is a native of Tughuan (Tuguan 土官) Mongghul Village, Huzhu 互助 Mongghul (Tu 土) Autonomous County, Qinghai 青海 Province and a surgeon at Qinghai University Attached Hospital (Qinghai daxue fushu yiyuan 青海大学附属医院 in Xining 西宁 City. In this essay he stresses the importance of preserving Mongghul culture, and encourages more people to participate in Mongghul studies.

Sghuu ghuarishidinna, bu Mongghulni yanjiulannangi kuja hurin kidi fan dawaxja. Bu jinada nanggu fandih kuja tijin kidi nesilaxja. Muulanii, dawaszan fandini bu jina yamada galaji guiguni puja. Smanba danglaji hanaladi kuji gharighaji nari rjeji ghuwa. Ne muni zamaa rdejin lisigawa bu sghan galawa, ye galaguxja. Zui marishida adajini bu ne Mongghulni winhuara yerishji, huraji, furalaji jiurisanni, darang ne shdocha, dog, nantari nehgini shaikiji furaliji hairanlawa. Galaja jida darang yii galasanni hudu hudungi luanna. Bu mudewa, Mongghul kungi, pujiu surisanhgi caihuada, ne sanba kun Mongghulni winhuara xahailaji warigu gulaguna. Aaba aama nda turaji, shge lighaji, pujiu surighuasanni ninba. Muni ne kun ne guseera ne hara ghajarishdi arang rja gua.

Mongghulni darang jiuriguni, huraji liuki xguni darang luanna. Niumalangni Mongghulni ahang kuja buraxja, lailasanni ye zinan zinandi maka buraji xna. Nige bura xma dii jiu qughuwaszanla nigewa. Muulasa dii hurin fanha Mongghul ugosa guura luan yii lailakua. Tiinga, ne Mongghulni mulaslahgi, mindii guura szaribatindii kunhgi

yiigualaarang xahailaji pujiuhgini sghan suriji, jinana logna  
yii marishidajiarang shdasa kujina gharighaji yiiguani  
shdadilangi huraji budanghulani huinagu mulaslahgidi liuki  
gii xi shdagugiji muulanii! Nigehuawa, bu muulanii  
shdayakiji nensa huina buarang masizagu shdaari ne  
niumalang Mongghulni luan yii lailasan winhuahgini lailasan  
kujina gharighaji xahailaya ginii!

Hanayiila, qi kenniisada? Anjisa rsanniihada xni  
fandi xnima sainiigiji bayarilanii! Mongghulni duralajin,  
surijin, kuji gharighajin yiiguadi hgali ginii!

## **STORIES**





## FATE

Gelsang Lhamu

*Fate* was written by Gelsang Lhamu (b. 1986), a Tibetan native of Chalitong Village, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 迪庆藏族自治州, Yunnan Province 云南省. She was motivated to write this story by the death of a girl in a neighboring village who died of leukemia in her final year of university.

A path densely floored with autumn leaves meandered behind a lofty red building. It had been her only companion since the dreadful truth had unveiled itself. She stood under a tree with heavy leaves. Shards of blue sky and sunrays peeked through in every possible way to the ground and touched her body. Unconsciously, she stood still, ignoring the beckoning leaves and the blue sky.

Her gray soul wondered, "Have I reached my end?" A tremor of grieved pain rippled through her body. Finally she let loose a heartbroken howl, "I love life! I can't lose it! I have burdens! Is this my predetermined fate? I'm not..."

Glistening tears flowed down her pale cheeks and soundlessly fell on the path. The wind gently scattered leaves in all directions. Her bloodshot eyes noticed every movement of the restive leaves—some sailed away in the wind while still others resisted the wind, steady as rocks.

Suddenly, a yellow leaf fell from the tree. She was annoyed that she didn't know the name of that tree. "Is this leaf tired, hanging on its branch like that?!" she wondered, placing the little leaf on her palm. A bit later she brought it near her colorless lips and kissed it comfortingly.

The little leaf became a tiny mirror, reflecting a dying, pallid face, tiny nose, dry lips, and red eyes. She thought it

was her. Parched lips moved weakly and the sounds they made were fathomless. Suddenly she managed, "I don't want to die. We could change it... together... we..." She tightly clutched the tiny mirror, but when she opened her hand, the only thing in her palm was the utterly desperate leaf.

...

Encouragement came unceasingly from friends and classmates: "Lhamu, autumn is fading away. Snow is coming. Winter is your favorite season and we're sure you'll be making another snowman, the prettiest one in this world."

"Lhamu, you're strong. We've never heard you say a single discouraging word."

"Lhamu, we'll stand by you forever!"

"She'll never give up, and never leave all the work to her family and only sister!"

"No, I won't give up. I trust my friends and myself. I will make the prettiest snowman again, fulfilling my friend's expectations. Lhamu, you can make it," she thought.

Tightly gripping the withering little leaf in her hand, she sped to her dorm room and stood motionlessly, alone in the empty room. She relaxed with a deep breath that brought warm comfort. She had never thought emptiness could be so comforting. She cautiously placed the leaf on her bed. The concrete floor had just been mopped and was still wet, which she ignored as she suddenly sat on the floor and madly searched in her old violet schoolbag for a green-ink pen. Finally locating it, she grasped it tightly, and gave the withering yellow leaf another, all-green life. But quickly she murmured, "I'm no longer an ignorant child. How ridiculous to deceive myself so foolishly. I'll die very soon—maybe tonight, maybe a few months later. I won't make another snowman. I won't set up a shop in the village for my sister as I promised. It's time to stop dreaming. But blood cancer? They don't know yet. What should I do?"

•••

Full days of farming work ended with the setting sun and strange odd-colored beams flashing brightly along the mountain edges, forcing Zhoma to squint. Every single part of her mind burnt with curiosity. When she opened her eyes, the sun had vanished. She decided to believe it was a hallucination. She tugged her old blue hat tight on her head and squatted on the filthy muddy ground against a huge pile of grass. She struggled, and finally managed to stand up with the heavy stack of grass on her back. She slowly began weaving her way home through rectangular fields, headed to her distant village, murmuring, "My daughter's final year of university," and then she smiled childishly.

Faintly in the distance she heard shouts: "Aunt Zhoma! Lhamu telephoned!" She walked as fast as she could, the pile of grass trembling on her back.

Flocks of black crows drew near, cawing wildly. She felt them coming toward her, a dreadful portent.

•••

At eight in the evening on that same day, a white ambulance pulled in front of the dormitory yard, its dissonant screams disturbing the usual campus quiet. It soon sped through the streets, but Lhamu had already surrendered to her fate.

NON-ENGLISH WORD LIST

Chalitong 查里通, Tsha ri thang ཅ་རི་ཐང

Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Bde chen bod rigs  
rang skyong khul བདེ་ཆེན་བོད་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ, Diqing  
zangzu zizhizhou 迪庆藏族自治州

Gelsang Lhamu, Skal bzang lha mo གླུ་མ་བཟང་ལྷ་མོ, Gerong  
Lamu 格茸拉木

Yunnan 云南 Province, Yun nan ཡུ་ནན་ནན

## A STOLEN JOURNEY

Blo bzang tshe ring

Blo bzang tshe ring (b 1984) is from A mgon Village, A mchog Town, Bsang chu County, Kan lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kan su'u Province. He says, "I wrote this story based on what I was told by the three men who brought the main character of the story to Zi ling City in their car."

Sky elephants wore orange trousers as the sun gradually clambered over East Mountain, beaming brightly into a pure, azure sky, the first rays of light dying the edges of fluffy clouds crimson. Moments later, the sun rose a bit more, revealing a window between the sun and mountain peak creating yet another majestic morning view. The green mountains were as hauntingly beautiful as usual. The extended grassland spread in every direction, like a perfect painting by an acknowledged master. At the foot of the mountain, winding burbling brooks flowed gently, creating never-ending peaceful melodies.

Ango Village began waking up. Smoke emerged from chimneys of each home. Breakfast and a new day were in the making!

Thirty-six year old Tsomo got up briskly and kindled a fire in an adobe stove with straw and yak dung. She did so prudently, in deference to her still-sleeping husband. This was her second time to get up, having already milked at three in the morning. Now she started to fetch water. Livestock, driven by children who had left before dawn, dotted the

magnificent grassland.

She quickly returned home with two buckets of water and at once swept here and there, cleaned the furniture, and put prepared food on the short-legged table. The family members soon assembled, sat in order of age around the table, and started breakfast. Tsomo poured milk tea into their bowls and then presented one respectfully with two hands to each of her parents-in-law.

The peaceful breakfast was interrupted by loud telephone rings. Tsomo answered and heard, "This is Putso. Your son Dawa disappeared last night."

Tsomo fainted, astonishing her family.

•••

A hard wind blew on Dawa's dark, thin face, bringing him back to consciousness. He first noticed the vast blue sky. His disheveled hair flapped in the wind, like a small black flag. He blinked and felt very cold. He realized he was leaning against a boulder. He staggered to his feet. A big valley appeared, encircling high mountains. He was frightened into utter stillness, not understanding why he was wearing a new pair of shoes and where the several keys in his left trouser pocket had come from.

He walked for several hours following a meandering stream. His intestines were full of water that gave him no energy. Evening came. He needed a place to spend the cold night but found nothing more inviting than a tree, which he collapsed under.

He got up early the next morning and continued on, eventually reaching an extensive grassland. He rested and drank from a stream. He had no food.

The sudden, unexpected sound of a distant

motorcycle ignited his energy. He ran toward the motorcycle believing it would solve his predicament. He stood straight as an arrow on the path as the motorcycle approached. He waved his arms in the air and shouted, "Please stop!"

The motorcycle slowed as it drew near.

"Where am I? Where am I?" he asked frantically.

The driver unwound a scarf protecting his face from the wind. He was surprised and speechless for a few seconds before blurting, "You are here."

"Oh! Where is here and where can I catch a bus?" he asked humbly.

"This is Bagan in Yushu. There are no buses here," the man answered, revving the motorcycle's engine.

"Can you take me somewhere?" he asked hopefully.

The driver said nothing in response and sped away.

He felt hopeless. Many hours earlier he had been in Nangchen. He guessed he was now far from there.

...

After the motorcycle left, Dawa chewed some sour-tasting plants, dipped his head in a stream, and staggered along the dirt road until he fell unconscious in a crumpled heap.

"Hello! Hello! Get out of the road!" said a man gruffly.

The strange voice revived him. A sleek black car was purring nearby. Another man stood by him.

He raised his head, smiled, and pleaded, "Can you give me a ride?"

"Who are you? Where are you from?" a heavy man asked in astonishment.

"I am Dawa from Gannan," he replied.

"Get into the car!" said the man compassionately.



It was warm in the car and the seats were as comfortable as springy cotton. The car raced as fast as the billowing wind, lulling Dawa to sleep, but not before he had learned the kind man's name—Tsering—from the conversation he had with the driver.

"Why are you taking this man?" the driver asked in Chinese.

"Maybe he is from my hometown," Tsering said.

Silence for a long time suggested they were suspicious about Dawa. "Beep! Beep!" the car tooted at a turn in the road, waking Dawa.

"Are you awake?" Tsering asked.

"Yes. Where are we now?" asked Dawa.

"We're near the Yushu-Golok border," murmured the driver.

Two sparkling eyes turned and Tsering asked, "Where in Gannan are you from?"

"Machu. My brother is in the Tibetan Middle School of Hezuo. I'm going there. Where are you from?" Dawa said.

"We are from Labrang. My son is also in that school," Tsering said.

Dawa was overjoyed, believing this newly established connection would encourage Tsering to help him.

•••

The sun rose high in the sky and sunrays shone brightly through the car windows. The men in the car felt warm. Beads of sweat budded on their scalps. Dawa wanted some air in the car and opened a car window. Fresh air rushed in, making them more comfortable. Somewhat revived, Tsering asked, "Why did you come to Yushu?"

"I really wanted to go to Lhasa, but I was delayed,"

Dawa said.

"What happened?" Tsering said.

"I sold my motorcycle and ran away from home twice last year, but my relatives caught me in Lanzhou both times. I couldn't register in a hotel because I know very little Chinese," Dawa said.

"Oh? Did you come to Yushu last year from Lanzhou?" said Tsering.

"No. My relatives took me home. All my family members scolded me. Father scolded less than others, but he said that I couldn't go alone anywhere, because I am uneducated. These criticisms meant I didn't enjoy the New Year Festival. It was very difficult to stay there. Then I decided to walk to Lhasa with some friends."

Tsering handed Dawa a cigarette and asked him to continue his story.

"We left for Lhasa one harsh morning on the second day of the second lunar month. I didn't ask my family for money. My friends had some. Each of us wore only Tibetan robes. We had only three small bags of *tsamba* and some butter. The first day we walked through a vast grassland and only ate twice. We stayed by a spring at night. We remained energetic about our pilgrimage.

"The second day, we reached somewhere in Golok. We met some nomad families, slept in their tent, and ate some good food they gave us. The next day we walked on barren land until late at night..."

The car gradually slowed and then stopped. They got out and stretched their legs for a bit. The driver checked the tires. They were 400 kilometers from Zi ling. Then they got back inside and headed toward Zi ling City.

"Tell us the rest of your story," Tsering said when

they were back in the car.

"We continued walking and eventually reached Yushu. We were exhausted from walking and searched for a place to sleep that night. Then several hunters with rifles talked to each other in their local dialect and approached us. Our hearts throbbed because we knew we were no match for them. They walked around us, tossing our few belongings here and there.

"A man with a thick moustache gestured for us to stand up. We didn't. He gestured again, and then his men beat us and snatched our money. We fought back and in the struggle I was knocked unconscious. When I woke up the next day nobody was there but me.

"Did you meet us on the road after you were robbed?" asked Tsering.

"No. I was hired by a local family to herd their livestock. I did this for two months. I was often hungry. They only gave me a small bowl of *tsamba* each day and no cash. One day I noticed some money in my tattered amulet. I tore it open and found 500 RMB secretly put there by my parents."

"What happened then?" asked Tsering.

"I left that family immediately and went to Nangcheng County Town by bus. I took a hotel room for four people and found two men already in it. They seemed to be very kind. They told me they were pilgrims.

"We went out for supper and shopped at the hotel owner's store. It was full of clothing, shoes, and food. I saw the clerk holding a bunch of keys to the hotel's rooms. When we left the store, my roommates pointed to a small truck. They said they were driving it to Lhasa and invited me to go with them. That night we talked a lot about our pilgrimage as

we drank hot water. A few cups of water later, I was dizzy and couldn't see clearly. The next day I woke up and found myself in a big valley."

"Maybe the two men took you to Bagan," Tsering said.

"I'm not sure," said Dawa.

"Dawa, have you been to school?" Tsering asked.

"No. My family couldn't afford the tuition. If I were educated, I wouldn't suffer like this," Dawa said sadly.

"Tuition is very expensive and it's very hard for parents to earn cash," said Tsering sympathetically.

"We're almost in Zi ling. Tomorrow we'll be home," the driver interjected in Chinese.

"Tomorrow is the fifteenth day of the fifth lunar month, the day of the horserace at home," Dawa thought to himself.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A mchog ཨ་མཚོག, A mu qu hu 阿木去乎  
Ango, A mgon ཨ་མགོན།  
Bagan, Ba gan བ་གན།, Ba gan 巴干  
blo bzang tshe ring ལྷོ་བཟང་ཚེ་རིང་།  
Bsang chu བསང་ཆུ།, Xiahe 夏河  
Dawa, ལྷ་བ།, Zla ba  
Golok, Mgo log མགོ་ལོག, Guoluo 果洛  
Hezuo, Gtsos གཙོས།, Hezuo 合作  
Kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ།, Gannan 甘南  
Kan su'u ཀན་སུའུ།, Gansu 甘肃  
Labrang, Bla brang ལྷ་བྲང་།, Xiahe 夏河  
Lanzhou, Lan kru'u ལན་ཀུའུ།, Lanzhou 兰州  
Lhasa, Lha sa ལྷ་ས།, Lasa 拉萨  
Machu, Rma chu ྷ་ཆུ།, Maqu 玛曲  
Nangchen, Nang chen ནང་ཆེན།, Nangqian 囊谦  
Putso, Phun tshogs ཕུན་ཚོགས།  
*tsamba, rtsam pa* རྩ་མ་བ།, *zanba* 糌粑  
Tsering, Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།  
Tsomo, Mtsho mo མཚོ་མོ།  
Yushu, Yu shul ཡུ་ཤུ།, Yushu 玉树  
Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།, Xining 西宁

## IS IT KARMA?

Pad ma rgya mtsho

Pad ma rgya mtsho (b. 1988) is from Wuzong Village, Darto (Nanduo) Township, Garzi (Ganzi) County, Garzi (Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan (Sichuan Province). He says, "I wrote this story based on what I heard from neighboring villagers."

Drolma was awakened by a threatening nightmare and couldn't return to sleep, though the outside was still blanketed in inky darkness. She finally sighed, got up, and pulled on tattered, smelly clothes. Her decrepitude only allowed her to toddle to the door, instinctively knowing she had to prepare breakfast. She made her way to the disordered kitchen where mice announced their presence through periodic squeaks and rustlings.

She started a fire. Flames reflected on her bleak face revealing rivers of wrinkles on a reddened forehead. She tranquilly sat, chanted scriptures, and spun her prayer wheel, recalling the past. Tears streamed from her shiny eyes.

...

After her husband's death, she lived with her only son, Dawa, a short, heavy-set man. His long black hair hung down to his wide shoulders. He sometimes wrapped it around his head with a red strip of cloth. Large, lustrous eyes shone under his thick eyebrows. His sharp nose suddenly appeared like a hill if he were viewed from some distance away.

Dawa particularly liked wearing a Tibetan knife that he felt made him a real man, confident and brave, however,

when he chatted with others, the lasting impression was of a friendly temperament.

•••

When Drolma returned from laboring in their fields, she was so exhausted that if she had been struck with even a pebble, she would have collapsed. She glanced around and saw nothing but the messy room, which created more discomfort. Suddenly her son appeared, giving her confidence, encouragement, and hope that life might be better.

Dawa was mischievous and loved to draw. When they visited monasteries, he gazed at *thangka* and frescos while others prostrated and circumambulated. Time seemed to stand still as he was utterly mesmerized by the colorful lines on the walls.

Dawa noticed his exhausted mother's return, put down his favorite drawing, rushed out of the room, and helped her scatter the weeds to dry that she had carried home to later use as fuel.

"Mother, a bowl of tea or a bowl of yogurt?" asked Dawa. She marched to a seat by the adobe stove, removed her muddy old shoes, and hesitantly replied, "Bring me a bowl of tea. I'm dying of thirst."

After serving a bowl of tea, he said, "I'll fetch water. Mother, you rest."

Although Dawa had never been to school, he could read some Tibetan and loved to write Tibetan on his completed drawings. When Drolma thought about their poverty, and her inability to send him to school, her bright eyes filled with tears. Neighbors admired Drolma for having such an intelligent, understanding son.

•••

Very early one winter morning some years later, the weak shining sun began rising in the distance. Drolma had waited

for her son to return from the county town throughout the frigid night. Cold and fatigue combined, clouding her vision. She murmured and decided to return to bed. At that moment, the sound of someone knocking on the small wood door was audible. She cautiously opened the door in fear it would fall off its old hinges if pushed forcefully. She was dumbfounded when she saw a strange woman with her son. She reluctantly invited them inside and sat, saying nothing.

The room was as quiet and silent as the room was empty of anything of value. Dawa dared not look at his mother but eventually managed, "Ama, this is Derji."

Drolma only coughed in response. She was extremely disappointed that he had found such a woman. Her curled blonde hair, reddened lips, and the clickety-clack of her high-heeled shoes were unfathomable. She summoned all her strength to control the situation but failed. Derji's sensuality had obviously attracted Dawa's attention and desire.

Dawa strode to his mother, stood silently for a few seconds, then quavered, "Ama, I want to marry her and bring her here to live. We promise we will help this family and Derji will assist you doing the chores."

Derji silently nodded.

Drolma contemplated for a moment, took Dawa aside, and said, "Dawa, she lives in the county town in better conditions than we have. There's a big gap between you two. You live in two totally different worlds. You have little in common. I am trying to help you avoid difficulties. This is against our traditions. We have no property of value."

He determinedly said, "I know, but she wants to live with me. She knows our circumstances. She understands this and doesn't care what we've got."

Realizing such firm resolve could not be altered and that she must accept this reality, she grudgingly asked, "When do you want to celebrate the wedding?"

Without hesitation he replied, "As soon as possible."



Dawa consulted a diviner for an auspicious date and then he and his mother made the needed preparations. The wedding was attended by relatives and friends who offered congratulations.

Drolma's life was one of great misery after Derji moved in. Derji did not obey her and Dawa always took Derji's side.

One day, the couple left, not intending to return until evening, leaving Drolma alone. She did the chores industriously as usual, sweeping each room and inspecting it to see if any dirty spots remained. When the sun started to set, she sensibly prepared dinner. Although she did everything impeccably, Derji began berating Drolma the moment they stepped through the door for being irresponsible.

Drolma wanted to talk with Dawa alone, but she was afraid of being ignored. She gave up, and continued working.

After more bitter years, Drolma had a grandson and a granddaughter whom she loved with all her heart and took very good care of. Nevertheless, Derji continued scolding and insulting her mother-in-law.

"Leave my children alone, or you'll profane them!" said Derji, one day as Drolma was teaching them how to tie their shoelaces.

"Old woman! Get far away from my children!" said Derji, her eyes shifting, not looking at Drolma.

Drolma continued helping the children and pitied them for having such terrible parents. She worried about the children's future.

"Ama, leave our bedroom. Look at your muddy shoes. They'll ruin the carpet!" said Dawa a few days later. Drolma couldn't believe her ears. She consoled herself that it hadn't really been said.

Dawa said it again.

Drolma was so shocked that she stood stiff as a statue. Life, suddenly, had become hardly worth living.

Dawa was unaware and, in general, uncaring about how much he had hurt his mother.

A few minutes later as thunder boomed and lightening came in long sharp shards in the streaming dark sky, Drolma's mind brimmed with sorrow. Suicide? Resistance? Her grandchildren appeared in her chaotic mind and she soliloquized, "Is it really karma? Is it true that you receive what you give?"

...

Years passed. When her grandchildren assumed some of the family responsibility, Dawa stole a motorcycle with his friends. The police investigated, arrested Dawa and his friends, and incarcerated Dawa.

Derji became more assertive and cruel.

Although Drolma suffered more than before, she lived for her son's return.

"Please invite some monks and chant scriptures for Dawa," suggested Drolma.

"Over my corpse!" Derji barked malignantly. "We don't have even enough money for ourselves. I must pay expenses for my children. Aren't you aware of this? How can we do the impossible? Money must come from somewhere."

"He's your husband and these children's father," said Drolma, pointing to the children.

"Bitch! You find the money and do it. He's also your dear son," said Derji.

When the children witnessed this, they looked hatefully at their mother and then rushed out of the room, screaming.

Derji ordered them to return, but they ignored her. Derji fiercely looked at her mother-in-law and bawled, "Devil! You created this! You'll pay for it!"

Drolma's streaming tears rivaled the flow of the stream silently running by the village. She trudged out of the

room to the local monastery to pray. While circumambulating the monastery, she heard monks melodiously chanting, creating a sense of peace and harmony. She then visited a great lama who could foretell the future, and who had been of great help to her in past years, when she couldn't, for example, collect all her sheep at sunset and darkness fell. It was dangerous to leave livestock in remote mountains where they were easy prey for wolves and vicious, stray dogs. The lama always told her the exact location of the missing sheep. This time she asked about her incarcerated son.

The lama counted his prayer beads for some time, nodded in a satisfied manner, and pronounced, "Mother Drolma, your son is healthy. He'll be released in a couple of months."

Joy carried her away when she heard this. She gratefully thanked the lama and happily walked home. This joy was, however, short-lived once she stepped inside her home and again encountered her daughter-in-law's coarse speech.

She looked forward to seeing her son over the next weeks. Days seem like years when you desperately want something. She continued to endure her daughter-in-law's never-ending litany of abuse, remaining stoically silent.

Her neighbors and relatives understood the unjustness of her life and several families encouraged her to live with them. One late afternoon, one of her brothers came to her home and said, "Sister, why don't you leave? Come to my home."

While pouring tea for her brother, Drolma replied, "I've spent most of my life here. Our ancestors spent their lives here. I won't leave. My deathbed should be here. I'll wait for my son."

"Are you willing to continue to endure such evil maltreatment from that bitch?" her brother said impatiently.

"What else can I do? Maybe it is my karma that I must undergo it," Drolma replied thoughtfully.

"Sister, this family and even your son aren't worth such misery," her brother said.

"I understand my son. Whatever he has done, he is still my son," said Drolma as her brother headed for the door.

Drolma continued turning her prayer wheel, counting prayer beads in her left hand, and murmuring the Six Sacred Syllables.

Some days later the sky was as blue as a bottomless glacial lake. Flocks of clouds danced madly in every direction. The grassland was ornamented by richly-scented flowers and the musical chirpings of songbirds. Bees competed to see who could collect the most pollen. Butterflies proudly and confidently waved their wings, displaying their beauty on this exquisite day.

Drolma took her grandchildren to the incomparable grassland, told stories, and talked about her past. The children gave her all their attention. While playing, a neighbor came and announced, "Your son has returned."

Stunned for a moment, Drolma then collected herself and rushed through the grass. The flowers' perfume heightened her sense of delight. She seemed to dash three steps at a time and quickly caught sight of her son, who was energetically talking with neighbors. When Dawa turned his head and saw his mother, his eyes filled with tears. He embraced her tightly, as though someone was about to take her away.

"How are you Ama? How have you been?" Dawa asked. He seemed to be the old, unmarried Dawa. When he held her hands that resembled dried, gnarled roots, he realized the magnitude of her suffering.

Drolma brushed her tears away and replied, "I'm well." Something blocked her throat and she was unable to say more.

"Ama, I wasn't always a good son. I'm responsible for these tragic events. I want to be a good, filial son," said Dawa.

"Did they beat you? Did you have good food? Did you suffer?" Drolma asked.

"Ama, all was not bad. I also had plenty of time to think," replied Dawa.

Drolma looked questioningly at Dawa and felt that he had changed.

When they moved inside and the children saw their father, they jumped into his hug. Dawa told them he had imagined they'd be weak, but when he saw how healthy and strong they were he was delighted. The children told him how their grandmother had cared for them, in contrast to their mother, who cared little about them. At times, they confided, she had beaten them with a stick.

Dawa felt even more sorrow for his enduring mother.

Friends and relatives visited over the next several days, and he learned more about how his wife had mistreated his mother.

"Dawa, do you know how much your mother suffered these years?" asked an intimate friend.

Dawa could only whisper, "I understand everything."

He intensely regretted the past and now detested Derji. When he recollected how cruelly she had treated his mother, he didn't want to speak to her.

Drolma prepared noodles for dinner one sweltering summer day. She had planned to cook rice but the children had begged for noodles. When the family was about to eat, Derji demanded, "Who gave permission to cook noodles on such a hot day?"

Drolma apologized, and offered, "If you don't like them, I'll make something else for you."

"You always waste food. You never think about the effort it has taken to earn it," bristled Derji.

"Smack!" echoed in the room.

"You don't have to eat. And you certainly don't have the authority to scold my mother!" Dawa exclaimed angrily.

"You... slapped me," gasped Derji, tears running down her cheeks.

"This is a warning. If you offend my mother again, I'll expel you from this home instantly," said Dawa.

Derji quietly sobbed, got up, and went to her room.

Dawa took his mother to her room and arranged her bedding. She said nothing. When he was about to close the door, she told him to apologize.

He politely agreed. Then he ordered the children to bed. He went to Derji's room and slept without turning on the light.

The next morning, Derji stayed in her room and didn't join the family for breakfast. When Drolma wanted to call her, Dawa stopped her. She didn't come out of the room the entire day, which enraged Dawa.

That night Dawa asked. "What do you want?"

"Nothing," replied Derji.

"Why didn't you come to breakfast this morning?" Dawa said.

"I wasn't hungry and I had a headache," she said.

"Are you still upset?" Dawa said

"Not really, but I'm hurt that you slapped me," she said.

"I hope you treat my mother as you treat your mother," said Dawa.

Derji didn't reply but seemed to nod assent.

Derji changed. She got up early to prepare breakfast and did the chores Drolma had done, but it was done in a spirit of hatred.

...

Several prosperous years passed. Drolma grew older and couldn't see well. But her son's good care meant she was in good health.

Dawa collected caterpillar fungus in spring and Derji did the necessary farming work.

The family seemed happy.

Unfortunately, it happened so suddenly that the reality was hard to accept—Dawa died one night without a single warning signal.

Relatives and friends came immediately when they received word. Gossip fluttered everywhere: Derji had poisoned him. He had died of an incurable disease.

Villagers helped with the funeral.

The children were anguished and cried endlessly but could only accept reality.

Drolma was visiting her brother the evil night of Dawa's death. She didn't know what had happened. Everything was in order when she returned. Derji pleaded with the villagers to keep the secret as long as possible in fear Drolma wouldn't be able to bear it. Even the grandchildren kept the secret.

"Where has Dawa gone?" asked Drolma.

"He went far away to work," replied Derji.

The answer was exactly the same each time she asked, just like a strip of cloth wrapped around her eyes.

Time passed. Dawa's death remained a mystery.

...

She heard something. The tea was boiling. She put her prayer wheel aside, took the kettle from the fire, and had a very simple breakfast.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Ama ཨ་མ།

Dawa ལྷ་བ།

Derji བདེ་སྐྱིད།

Drolma ལྷོ་ལ་མ།

Garzi དཀར་མཛོས། 甘孜

Garzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture དཀར་མཛོས་བོད་  
རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ། 甘孜藏族自治州

lama ལྷ་མ།

Nanduo མདའ་མདོ། 南多

Pad ma rgya mtsho པད་མ་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

Sichuan སི་ཁྲོན། 四川

thangka ཐང་ག།

Wuzong འོང་བཟང། 吾绒





## **FOLKLORE**



## BEAR AND RABBIT (I)

G.yu lha

G.yu lha writes:

I recorded this folktale from Thub bstan (b. 1936), the reincarnate lama in Siyuewu Village (Puxi Township, Rangtang County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province) when I visited him in the winter of 2009-2010. Thub bstan learned this folktale from his mother. I heard this tale when I was around six years old from my great grandfather when my family was having dinner near the stove one evening.

A black bear mother and her daughter, and a rabbit mother and her daughter, lived in the same forest. The two mothers went to the grassland every day to dig *gro ma*.<sup>1</sup>

One evening, the mother bear arrived home without the mother rabbit.

"A ma dred mo,<sup>2</sup> did you see my mother? Is she coming?" asked the baby rabbit.

"She will come if you make the fire bigger and boil some tea," replied the mother bear. Then the rabbit made the fire as big as she could and boiled the tea, but her mother still didn't come.

"Is my mother coming soon?" she asked the mother bear.

"Make the fire smaller, and then she'll come," the mother bear said.

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<sup>1</sup> This small, red-skinned tuber grows on high altitude

<sup>2</sup> Mother Bear.

After a long time, the baby rabbit asked the mother bear again, "Why is my mother still not here? Is she coming or not?"

"If you continue asking me I will eat you! Go to bed and sleep," said the mother bear.

The baby rabbit went to bed and secretly listened to the conversation between the mother black bear and her daughter, and learned that her mother had been eaten by the mother bear.

The mother bear went out as usual to search for *gro ma* the next day. The baby rabbit was very clever and asked the baby bear to play a game with her. The baby rabbit asked the baby bear to put a piece of paper on his chest and she put a flat stone on her chest, and then they shot each other with arrows. The baby rabbit let the baby bear shoot first, and then the rabbit shot the bear and killed him. After that, she fled for her life.

First, she saw a man who was herding sheep on a boundless grassland. "Uncle, is there anywhere that I can hide? My mother was killed by the mother bear and so I killed the mother bear's cub," said the baby rabbit to the shepherd.

"Climb into the oldest and biggest sheep's ear," replied the herder. The baby rabbit climbed into the ear just as the mother bear arrived.

"Did you see a rabbit running across the grassland? Tell me the truth, otherwise I'll swallow you!" said the mother bear to the shepherd.

"It's in the oldest and biggest one's ear," said the shepherd.

The baby rabbit had taken some ash and *gro ma* with her when she left home. She threw the ash into the mother bear's eyes and escaped as the bear wiped her eyes.

Next, the baby rabbit saw a horse herder in a dense forest. "Is there anywhere that I can hide? My mother was

killed by the mother bear and so I killed the bear's cub," said the baby rabbit to the horse herder.

"Get into the biggest horse's ear," he said, and the baby rabbit climbed into the horse's ear just as the mother bear arrived.

"Have you seen a rabbit running past here? Tell me the truth otherwise I'll swallow you," the mother bear yelled at the horse herder.

"It's in the biggest horse's ear!" the horse herder said.

The rabbit took a handful of ash, threw it in the bear's eyes, and escaped as the bear wiped her eyes.

After running a long way, the rabbit met a tiger. "Uncle Tiger, can you hide me from the bear? My mother was killed by the mother bear and so I killed her cub," said the rabbit.

"Get into my ear," said the tiger and so the rabbit climbed into the tiger's ear just as the bear arrived.

"Have you seen a rabbit running through here? Tell me the truth otherwise I'll swallow you!" said the mother bear.

"Swallow me? I'll show you 'swallow you'!" said the tiger angrily to the mother bear, and then opened his mouth and swallowed the bear.

"*Zhi, zhi*,"<sup>3</sup> the tiger heard the rabbit chewing something in his ear and asked, "What are you eating?"

"I was so hungry that I took out one of my eyes to eat. Would you like to try some?" said the rabbit and handed some *gro ma* to the tiger.

"It's very delicious. Can you take out one of my eyes also?" said the tiger. The rabbit plucked out one of the tiger's eyes and put it in the tiger's mouth. The poor tiger said, "Mine's not like yours. Mine is bitter."

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<sup>3</sup>*Zhi zhi* is onomatopoeic for chewing.

"That's strange. Try another piece of mine," the rabbit said and gave the tiger another piece of *gro ma*.

The tiger chewed it carefully and wondered why the eye given by the rabbit was sweet but his was bitter. He was curious and decided to try his other eye. "I decided to eat my other eye, but afterwards I'll be blind. You'll have to lead me slowly where the road is rough, and lead me a bit faster when the road is flat," said the tiger.

Rabbit agreed, gouged out the tiger's other eye, and fed it to the tiger.

"My eyes were not as tasty as yours," said the blind tiger. The rabbit then led the tiger faster when the road was bad and slower when the road was better, doing the opposite of what the tiger had asked her to do. Finally, they reached a cliff top and made a fire to warm themselves. The rabbit asked the tiger to sit near the edge of the cliff, pushed the fire towards the tiger, and said, "Uncle Tiger, move back a little otherwise your beautiful skin will be burnt." The rabbit did this several times and eventually the tiger fell from the cliff.

The rabbit continued on her way and arrived at a house where a couple and their baby lived with some cows.

"There is a dead tiger near the foot of the cliff. If you want it, I'll care for your baby and cows while you are away," said the rabbit to the couple.

The couple thought this was a good offer, and headed off to find the tiger. Not long after they left, the rabbit killed the constantly crying baby and the annoying cows. She filled the baby up with ash and laid it in the bed, and then filled the cows with straw and stood them up outside. When the couple returned, the wife tried to nurse the baby but couldn't and ashes came out whenever she patted the baby. She went downstairs and tried to milk the cows but they each fell down one after the other.

"You detestable, cunning rabbit! You can't escape from your death today!" shouted the couple.

"You are right. I ought to die but I want to tell you a way to kill me that will cause me great suffering. You, Wife, take the millstone and wait for me atop the ladder. You, husband, take your bow and arrow and wait for me underneath the ladder. I'll stand halfway up the ladder. When I say 'Go!' you, Wife, drop the millstone on me and you, Husband, shoot at me with your bow and arrow. This way I'll die at both of your hands. Won't that be wonderful!" suggested the rabbit.

The couple followed the rabbit's advice. The wife took the millstone and waited at the top of the ladder, and the husband took his bow and arrow and waited at the bottom of the ladder.

"Go!" said the rabbit and quickly jumped up through a hole in the wall near the ladder and flew up to the moon. The millstone killed the husband and the arrow killed the wife, but each was actually killed by the rabbit.

My story is finished. People say that's why there is a rabbit in the moon today.



NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A ma dred mo ཨ་མ་དྲེད་མོ། 熊妈妈

Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture ཇ་བ་བོད་

རིགས་ཆའང་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ། 阿坝藏族羌族自治州

G.yu lha གཡུ་ལྷ། 依娜

gro ma གྲོ་མ། 人参果

Puxi ཕུ་ཁྱེ། 蒲西

Rangtang རར་ཐང་ཐང་། 壤塘

Sichuan སི་ཁྲོན། 四川

Siyuewu སི་ཡུའེ་ཡུ། 斯跃武

Thub bstan ཐུབ་བསྟན། 头丹

## BEAR AND RABBIT (II)

Snying dkar skyid

Snying dkar skyid writes:

I recorded this story from Khro mo rgyal (b. 1927) in Stag rig Village (Khrang dmar Township, Khri ka County, Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province). She is one of the best storytellers in the village. Most village children have heard stories from her. She also knows much village history.

I recorded several folktales from Khro mo rgyal in my home during the winter of 2009-2010. Each time we finished a story she immediately asked, "Do you need more? I can tell more if you like."

I first heard this story from Khro mo rgyal when I was a child. At that time, we often tried to finish dinner early and then ran to Khro mo rgyal's home to hear stories, especially if the weather was warm. Many village children gathered in her courtyard and sat on the ground to listen to her stories. I remember one time that she told twelve different stories, one after the other.

Now things have changed. Children no longer listen to Khro mo rgyal's stories, and she misses the times when many children gathered in her home to listen to her.

Once there was a mother bear with a cute cub. Their neighbors were a mother rabbit and her baby. Every day the two mothers went out to dig their main food, which was *gro ma*. They left their babies at home to play together when they were away.

One sunny day, the mother rabbit went as usual to call the mother bear to go dig *gro ma*. They went to the mountains near their homes as they did every day, and started digging. As she dug, the mother bear dug one *gro ma* and ate it, dug another one and ate it, and so on. Thus, at the end of the day, her bag was empty.

The mother rabbit hadn't been greedy and hadn't eaten even one *gro ma*, so at the day's end she had a big full bag. The mother bear saw this and felt ashamed to go home with an empty bag. She began to think of a way to get the mother rabbit's *gro ma*, and eventually she had an idea. She knew the rabbit had a big soul-wart on her head, so the mother bear said to mother rabbit, "We haven't rested for a long time. Let's take a short break, OK?"

"OK. Just a short rest though, otherwise our babies might worry since it's getting dark," said the mother rabbit, smiling.

"Sure," the bear replied. "Let me scratch your head. I've heard that this helps you relax."

"How kind of you," said the mother rabbit as she lay on the ground, putting her head on the mother bear's legs.

They talked about their babies and how cute and well-behaved they were. Little did the mother rabbit know she was in mortal danger. Suddenly, the mother bear cried out in amazement, "What is that big, black thing on your head?"

"Don't touch it! That is my soul! If you squeeze it, I'll die," said the mother rabbit nervously.

"Oh, really? OK then," said the mother bear, and squeezed the big black wart, killing the mother rabbit instantly, just for a bag of *gro ma*.

Next, she pulled the mother rabbit's dead body to pieces and put them in her bag, along with the mother rabbit's *gro ma*.

The day grew dark as the baby rabbit waited for her mother. As the mother bear was going along the path in front of the rabbits' home, the baby rabbit called, "Mother Bear, where is my mother? Isn't she coming with you? Where is she now?"

"Dear baby, go boil some tea for your mother and she will come soon. Just wait for her with some hot tea," said the mother bear, and then went off, carrying the mother rabbit's dead body and the *gro ma* in her bag.

The poor baby rabbit boiled tea and then went out again to wait for her mother. When she didn't come, she shouted, "Mother Bear, where is my mother now?"

"Your mother will come from behind the small hill. Just prepare some noodles for her and she'll come soon," yelled the mother bear.

The baby rabbit cooked noodles for her mother and waited, but still no one came. The baby rabbit began to worry, for it was very late and her mother still hadn't come. She started to think that maybe something had happened.

The baby rabbit went to the mother bear's house, climbed on the roof, and saw that the mother bear was putting meat in a pot. She saw something hanging from the eaves. When she looked closely, she realized it was her mother's legs and head. The head was terrifying! She also saw her mother's bag on the table and realized that the mother bear had killed her mother because of the *gro ma*. She whimpered and decided to take revenge.

One day she saw the mother bear leave her home. She called the baby bear to play outside, "Baby bear, come outside and play with me, I'll take you to a place you have never been before," called the baby rabbit.

"No! Go away! My mother said I can't go outside. It's too dangerous," the baby bear yelled at the baby rabbit.

"Your mother is not at home. Come play with me for a bit. Your mother won't know," said the baby rabbit.

"Hm... a little while is OK, but I need to come back early. Let's go now," said the baby bear happily.

"Just follow me," said the baby rabbit, hopping and smiling.

At last, they reached a threshing stone resting on two small supports. The baby rabbit smiled and said, "It's really nice to play with the threshing stone."

"Wow! How do we play with the threshing stone? I've never played with such a thing. Teach me how to play with it," said the baby bear excitedly.

"OK, first I'll go under the threshing stone while you lift it, then you can go under it while I lift it," said the baby rabbit.

"OK," said the baby bear and lifted the threshing stone.

After the baby rabbit had gone under it, she said, "It's your turn, come on."

When the baby bear went under the threshing stone, the baby rabbit dropped it, crushing the baby bear to death.

Having avenged her mother's death, the baby rabbit fled, knowing that the mother bear would try to kill when she found her dead cub.

While escaping, the baby rabbit overheard two yak herders. One man said, "Did you see a big bear asking people if they had seen a rabbit? Someone must have made her unhappy because she was in a rage."

The other herder said, "Yeah, I saw her. She was so strong! Whoever she is looking for will surely die—that's the only possibility. She'll be here soon."

When the baby rabbit heard that, she asked the two herders to let her hide in the nose of one of their yaks. Just as she climbed in, the mother bear ran up and asked them if they had seen a rabbit. They told her that the rabbit had been there and left, and pointed to show the way. The bear ran off in the direction they indicated.

After a while, the rabbit jumped down to the ground, thanked the herder, and resumed her journey. In the same way she hid in a sheep's wool when the bear approached. The bear asked the shepherd if he had seen a rabbit and he answered, "I saw a rabbit. It went that way just a minute ago." Then the mother bear ran off in the direction the shepherd indicated.

When the bear left, the rabbit thanked the shepherd and resumed her journey.

When she reached a field, she saw a strong yak eating grass with several yak calves. Suddenly, she saw the mother bear standing nearby. His eyes were glowing like coals and her mouth was wide open. The rabbit realized she was going to be swallowed. Without any recourse, she said, "Dearest Uncle Yak, my mother was killed by that bear, so I killed her baby, and now she is going to kill me. She killed my mother first! I'm not in the wrong. Please help me, I beg you."

"Is it true? If what you said is true, I will definitely help you," said Uncle Yak.

"How would I dare lie to you?" said the rabbit, kneeling to Uncle Yak, her front paws held together in supplication.

"OK! Now, look at me. I promise I will kill that demon in a few seconds," said Uncle Yak gravely.

"Come! I'm not afraid of you at all," said the mother bear, grinding her sharp teeth on a huge stone, preparing to challenge Uncle Yak. After a few seconds, they charged each other. At last the mother bear was defeated. She turned and ran, saying she would surely return to take revenge. Her face was covered with blood as she fled.

Then old Uncle Yak said, "I helped you, so now what will you give me as a reward?"

"I have nothing to give you, but I will say good words to praise you," said the smart rabbit.

"I would like to hear these good words," said Uncle Yak, sitting on a big stone beside a wall with a hole in it.

"Uncle Yak's eyes are gold eyes, Uncle Yak's nose is a gold nose, Uncle Yak's mouth is a gold mouth, Uncle Yak's hands are gold hands, Uncle Yak's legs are gold legs..." said the rabbit.

"OK. What's next?" Uncle Yak asked happily.

"Uncle Yak's eyes are shit eyes, Uncle Yak's nose is a shit nose, and Uncle Yak's mouth is a shit mouth," said the rabbit and ran to the other side of the wall.

Uncle Yak furiously charged the hole in the wall. Although the hole was big, his head was bigger—especially with his two horns. He thus got stuck in the hole and died.

Then the rabbit went on, feeling hungry after meeting so many difficulties. She fortunately soon saw a nearby house, went up, and knocked on the door. A woman opened it and invited her in. The rabbit saw there was a baby sleeping on the bed. The woman offered her good food and after she had eaten enough, she said, "I killed a large yak just a bit ago in a field near here. If you want its meat, go get it."

"Is that true? If so, my husband and I would like to go fetch it," said the woman.

"It's true. Go and I'll care for your baby," said the rabbit in a friendly manner.

The couple then took a long rope and left. The baby cried without stopping. The rabbit slit open the baby's belly, removed the viscera, and stuffed a pigeon inside. Next, she cut the baby's head off, put it under the quilt, and covered it up again. Lastly, she cut off the baby's arms and legs and put them into a pot of boiling water.

When the couple happily returned with the yak's carcass, the rabbit said that she had cooked meat for them. The couple happily ate the meat. They then realized that their baby had been sleeping for a long time. When they took away the quilt, the baby's head rolled onto the floor. They

immediately understood that they had eaten their own baby's flesh, screamed, and decided to take revenge.

"These two just ate their own baby's flesh!" yelled the rabbit loudly repeatedly as she hopped away.

The baby rabbit came in front of their house to yell like that day after day. The man wanted to kill the rabbit so he went outside and said to the rabbit that he would kill her if she came near their house again.

One day, the man put some glue on a big stone in front of their house. Later, the rabbit came to their house, sat on the stone, and yelled as usual.

The man came out and said, "This time, I will not let you go. I want to avenge my dear baby."

The rabbit wanted to run away, but her bottom was stuck to the stone. She couldn't move. "Please put some ash in my ears so you can kill me," said the rabbit.

"OK, I will listen to you one last time since you are about to die," said the man and put ash into the rabbit's ears. Suddenly, the rabbit shook her head and all the ash went into the man's eyes. Then the rabbit ran away.

In the end the rabbit won.



NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Khrang dmar ཁང་དམར། 常牧

Khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ། 贵德

Khro mo rgyal ཁྲོ་མོ་རྒྱལ།

Mtsho lho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture མཚོ་ལྷོ་བོད་རིགས་

རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ། 海南藏族自治州

Qinghai མཚོ་ལྷོ་ན། 青海

Snying dkar skyid སྤིང་དཀར་སྦྱིད། 羊格姐

Stag rig ལྷག་རིག

## THE FROG BOY AND HIS FAMILY

Mchod pa'i lha mo

Mchod pa'i lha mo (b. 1984) is from Gnam mtsho ma Village, Dme ru ma Township, Rnga ba County, (Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province). She writes:

Learning folktales was something I loved to do as a child. Every night, I asked my parents, brothers, sisters, and familiar guests to tell stories. Children who lived in remote herding pastures were proud of knowing many stories at that time, when there was no electricity to watch TV and videos. We children shared our stories with each other when we herded yaks and during our free time, especially after dinner.

We shared stories in turn. When it was my turn, I often told the story of the frog boy and his family because, when I first learned this story from my eldest sister (Chosenyi Drolma; b. 1975), I found the characters to be interesting, mysterious, and frightening.

### The Frog's Appearance

An old woman lived alone. One day, her right knee ached, which made her rub it repeatedly. To her surprise, a frog suddenly came out from her knee. Thinking it was a bad sign, she felt very depressed. The frog saw the old woman's sad and worried expression and said, "Mother, don't worry for I will not disappoint you. The king's daughter will be my wife."

The old woman said, "How can a frog possibly get a king's daughter for his wife. Don't say such things! If the king hears this, our life will be in danger!"

The frog said, "Mother, you will see me come home tonight with the king's daughter."

The old woman thought it was impossible as the frog left to propose to one of the king's daughters.

### The Frog Gets a Wife

When the frog neared the king's palace, the dogs barked loudly. The king asked his eldest daughter to check. She went out and looked around, didn't see anything unusual, returned to the palace, and reported that everything was as usual. She added, "Maybe our dogs bark a lot because they are too full."

After a while, the dogs resumed barking madly and the king asked his second daughter to check. She also didn't find anything unusual and returned with the same report. The king trusted his daughters and didn't think about it further.

A short time later, however, the dogs resumed barking furiously. This time the king asked his youngest daughter to find out the cause. The third daughter noticed a tree in their courtyard was moving a little. She returned to the king and said, "A tree was moving a bit. Other than that, nothing else is happening."

The king believed her as he had his other two daughters. The frog was small and none of the daughters had seen him.

Just after the third daughter's report, the frog entered the palace and spoke, shocking the king and everyone in the palace. They were sure it was a bad omen.

The king asked his servants to bring the frog nearer. The frog said, "I came here tonight to propose to one of your daughters. I want her to be my wife."

The king laughed loudly, thinking how utterly ridiculous it was, while his first and second daughter made

silly expressions. The frog noticed that the king's third daughter's expression was different and also realized that she was prettier than the other two.

The king said to the frog, "It's impossible! Servants, throw this frog out of the palace!"

The frog said, "Please wait! Wait! If you don't give me your third daughter, I'll stretch out my body and your palace will collapse."

The king laughed and said, "Please go ahead and stretch out your body. We do not fear frogs."

The frog then had no choice and began stretching out his body. The palace started to shake and almost collapsed. The terrified king begged the frog to stop and promised that he would allow the frog to take his youngest daughter for his wife.

The frog stopped, but the king didn't keep his promise. The frog said, "If you don't grant my request, I will laugh loudly and your palace will be destroyed by a strong wind."

The king said, "It's up to you. We're not afraid of a frog."

The frog started laughing. Strong wind came, almost destroying the palace, forcing the king to plead with the frog to stop and renewing his promise.

As before, the frog believed the king and stopped and, as before, the king broke his promise. Then the frog said, "If you don't give me your daughter this time, I will cry and not only your palace, but the whole area will be destroyed by heavy rain."

The king didn't believe this and told the frog to cry. The frog cried. Suddenly there was lightning and heavy rain. When the palace was almost flooded, the king again begged the frog to stop.

The frog said, "You must keep your promise or I will cry loudly again and again." The king had no other option and so gave his daughter to the frog. The frog stopped crying and everything returned to normal. The frog then

cheerfully returned to his home with the king's third daughter and much property.

When the frog arrived, he asked his mother to open the door. She said, "You little frog can enter the tent from anywhere, there is no need to open the door."

The frog said, "Mother, it is OK for me, but your daughter-in-law and her property cannot come inside without you opening the door."

She still didn't believe him and said, "If you are with a woman, tell her to speak."

The frog's wife said, "He's right, I am with him."

The astonished old woman then opened the door and was happy to see her daughter and the property that they had brought. The old woman then began a happy life with her frog son and her daughter-in-law.

### The Horserace

One day, a horserace festival was to be held and the frog asked his mother and wife to dress up and attend. He said, "I'm a frog and it unnecessary for me to go. I'll stay at home and tend the livestock."

Then his mother and wife dressed up in their best clothes and set off. Once they were gone, the frog took off his skin, put on white clothes, mounted a white horse, and galloped to the horserace. He was now a very handsome young man.

When his mother and wife reached the horserace area, they noticed a very handsome man whom they didn't recognize. He rode a white horse, wore expensive white clothes, and was the winner of the horserace. The audience endlessly speculated who he was, but none knew. To everyone's surprise, he smiled at his mother and wife several times but, to them, he was a stranger.

The first day of the horserace ended and everybody returned home. When the frog's mother and his wife got

home, the frog asked, "How was the horserace? Did you two enjoy yourselves?"

They said that they had a great time and his wife told him about the stranger—the handsome man, and the champion of the horserace.

The frog asked them to describe the man.

His wife described the stranger in detail and began to wonder if the stranger might be her husband, the frog.

The next morning, the frog told his mother and wife to attend the second day of the horserace festival while he stayed at home and tended the livestock. That day, his wife and mother left together.

On the way, his wife said she had forgotten something and told her mother-in-law to go on with their neighbors. "I'll catch up with you soon," she said. She wanted to know if the strange man was her husband. She went to the back of the tent, looked inside through a corner, and saw the frog remove his skin and become the handsome man that they had seen at the horserace festival. She was very pleased to see her husband was so handsome and waited until he left the tent. Just after his departure, she entered the tent and burned the frog skin. She wanted her husband to show his real appearance and didn't think about what might happen if she burned the frog skin. Then she went to the horserace. She saw her husband, who again won the horserace. He smiled at his mother and wife as he had done the day before.

When they finished the horserace, the frog rushed home and found his skin had been burned. He was terribly worried when his wife and mother returned and said, "If I show my real appearance, the nine-headed devil will force me to be his servant. Now, without the frog-skin, I cannot hide and the nine-headed devil will come soon and take me away. Wife, please care for my mother."

## The Frog is Stolen by the Nine-Headed Devil

His wife was very sad, regretted burning the frog skin, and had no idea how to save her husband's life. Suddenly, a strong wind came and took the frog boy away. His wife was full of regret and set out searching for him with some food.

She went a very long way and met many people, but none had seen her husband. She continued her journey and one day met an old man. She told him what had happened and why she was wandering about.

The old man was shocked, told her the mission was very dangerous, and suggested she return home.

The frog's wife insisted on continuing her journey till she met her husband.

The old man said, "It is impossible for you to meet your husband. Many have been taken by the nine-headed devil and none have returned. If you go there, the nine-headed devil will kill you or keep you for his slave for the rest of your life.

The frog's wife insisted that she would continue to search for her husband, so the old man then finally showed her the way to the nine-headed devil's palace.

She thanked him and walked on toward the palace. A few days later she reached the palace and saw her husband wearing metal clothing and fetching water. She was very excited to see him and ran to him in tears.

Her husband said in surprise, "You are very lucky today because the nine-headed devil went hunting for human blood. He will return tonight and we must find a way to kill him."

They then both went to the palace, where the wife hid in an underground room that was nine floors high. He told her, "When the nine-headed devil closes his eyes in bed, he can hear even a mouse walking. You must not move at that time. But when his eyes are wide open, it means he is deep asleep and he can't hear anything. This is the time you must come thrust this spike into his heart. He will die when the spike breaks into two pieces."

The nine-headed devil returned to the palace. He was in an unhappy mood, sniffed, and said, "There is the odor of human blood."

The frog boy said, "Of course, because I have human flesh."

The nine-headed devil didn't ask further questions and went to bed.

### Killing the Nine-Headed Devil

At midnight, the nine-headed devil opened his eyes very wide and went to asleep. The frog boy got up and took his wife from the deep underground room. She then stabbed the spike that her husband had given her into the heart of the nine-headed devil, breaking it in two. The nine-headed devil gave out such a shuddering last gasp that the palace shook.

The couple was very happy for they no longer needed to worry about the nine-headed devil and the frog boy also no longer needed to live in the frog's skin. Many rooms in the huge palace had prisoners. The frog boy and his wife opened each room and saved many people. They also found many human corpses and dead animals. In the last room, they discovered an old, thin woman with white hair. She told them she had been put in the room when she was very young and was delighted to learn the nine-headed devil was dead. She gratefully thanked them.

### A Joyful Reunion

The frog boy and his wife happily returned home. The mother was very pleased to see her son and daughter-in-law return. The frog boy and his family had a wonderful and happy life together.



## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Chosenyi Drolma ཚོས་ཉིད་སྒྲེལ་མ།

Dme ru ma དམེ་རུ་མ། 麦尔玛

Gnam mtsho ma གན་མ་མཚོ་མ། 郎措玛

Mchod pa'i lha mo མཚོད་པའི་ལྷ་མོ།

Rnga ba རྩ་བ་ 阿坝

Rnga ba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture རྩ་བ་བོད་

རིགས་ཆའང་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ།

## MCHIG NGES

Zla ba sgrol ma

Zla ba sgrol ma (b. 1990) is from Mdzo 'dar (Rong da 绒达) Village, Phu ma (Pu ma 普马) Township, Sde dge (Dege 德格) County, Dkar mdzes (Ganzi 甘孜) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan 四川 Province. She writes:

When I was a child, there was no electricity in my village. Every time Grandfather (Dpen zen; b. 1929) visited, he told us stories that often encouraged us to be good people. These two stories are the most unforgettable. From 'Paying a Debt of Gratitude' we learned that we need to be kind to animals, and also that we need to repay our debt to people who have helped us. The story about Mchig nges is altogether different. It is just for amusement.

Ten *A jo*-pilgrims on their way to Lha sa-met Mchig nges one day who asked them, "Where are you going?"

They answered, "We are on pilgrimage to Lha sa to see the holy Buddha image, the *jo bo*. We will also visit all the holy places there."

Mchig nges said, "There are many holy things in my home to see if you'd like to come see them."

They asked, "What kind of holy things are there in your home?"

Mchig nges replied, "I have *sgo gtsig drog*, 'The gate which can sound *zi* once'. There is the *lha khang nyi ma dgur shar* 'the temple with nine shining suns'. And I also have *ra*

*ka gtag* 'the goat which is tied on a post' in my home."<sup>1</sup>

The pilgrims then decided to visit Mchig nges's home. When they arrived, he opened the gate, which was so old it made the sound 'zi'. He introduced this gate as the famous *sgo gtsig drog*. Then they saw a goat tied to a post. Mchig nges said, "This is the *ra ka gtag*."

Next, they entered the house, which was very shabby. The walls were full of holes through which light poured. Mchig nges said, "This is the *lha khang nyi ma dgur shar*."

The pilgrims were very angry and said, "You mocked us. We spent an entire day to come here because you told us that you had holy things. We're not going to let you play tricks on us," and then they tried to beat him.

Later, they took him to the local leader. Mchig nges said, "I showed them every holy thing I had but they tried to beat me. What should I do?"

The pilgrims told the leader about everything that Mchig nges had shown them and how he had cheated them. The leader said, "I know that Mchig nges mocked you. He is always doing such things. However, he is very poor and he has nothing that we can take from him as punishment. The only thing that we can do is this—you can each shit on his roof above the stove to punish him for his mockery. Now, just go back to Mchig nges's house, climb to the roof, and shit above his stove."

The pilgrims said, "OK. Let's go to Mchig nges's house," went to Mchig nges's house, climbed up on the roof, and prepared to shit above his stove.

Mchig nges said, "Now, you can all go ahead and shit above my stove, because that is what the leader ordered. No one can oppose his decision. But when you are shitting above my stove you may not piss, otherwise I'll shove the

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<sup>1</sup> These names resemble names of pilgrimage sites in or near Lhasa.

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chimney up your butt."

The pilgrims said one after the other, "I can't shit without pissing," and all left without taking revenge.

## REPAYING A DEBT OF GRATITUDE

Zla ba sgrol ma

Long ago an only son lived with his old mother who wove cloth while the boy tended the family's donkey. The two of them had a happy life.

One day the old woman finished weaving two pieces of cloth. When the boy asked his mother to give him the cloth to sell in the market, she refused on the grounds that he did not know how to do business. However, the boy insisted on taking his donkey and going to sell the cloth. He would not listen no matter what his mother said. Finally she consented. He then tied the cloth to the donkey's back, set off, and eventually reached a place he had never been before.

At the bottom of a valley some boys had caught a monkey and were trying to kill it. The boy went over to them and said, "Please don't kill that monkey."

The boys replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something."

The boy thought for a minute and said, "I can't give you anything except some cloth," and then gave them one of the pieces of cloth. The boys then freed the monkey and he continued on his way until he got to a place where several boys had caught a mouse and were trying to kill it. He said to the boys, "Please don't kill that mouse."

They replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something." So the boy gave them his other piece of cloth, they freed the captive mouse, and then he and his donkey set off together.

Eventually he came to where some men had caught a bear in a trap. He pleaded, "Please don't kill the bear."

The men replied, "We will kill it unless you give us something." The boy gave them the donkey and then they

freed the bear.

The boy was now all alone and walked until he came to a big village where a rich merchant lived. The boy went to the home of the rich merchant where there was a well from which the family's servants fetched water. He sat there and begged food from the rich merchant, who ignored him.

A few days later, the servants said, "That strange boy has been here a long time. He must be a thief. We must not let him stay here any longer. We need to drive him away from the village."

Then the rich merchant grabbed the boy, put him in a big box, sewed up the box in yak leather, and threw it into the river. The boy didn't even have a chance explain to them that he was not a thief! The box floated for many days until it eventually came to a fork in the river, where it stopped, right in the middle. The box's leather cover had some fat on it, which attracted a mouse. The mouse gnawed the fat, chewed through the leather, was surprised to smell a person in the box, looked inside, and saw the boy who had saved his life.

The mouse worriedly ran to his friend, the monkey, and asked for help. When the monkey heard this and realized that it was the boy who had saved his life, he fetched his friend, the bear. The bear, understanding it was the boy who had saved his life, and immediately came to the river to help. The three animals arrived together. The monkey used his claws to tear the leather that covered the box, and the bear broke the box with his paws.

After climbing out of the box, the boy told them his story.

The animals said, "Go to the other side of the river and we can help you live happily. You won't have to beg anymore." The boy went to the other side of the river and then sat and waited for his friends to arrive. After an hour the monkey, the mouse, and the bear arrived carrying a long stone.

They told him to hold it and pray for food, a house, and clothes, and the next morning he would get whatever he had prayed for.

The boy sat in the field that night and prayed for delicious food, beautiful clothes, and a nice house and then went to sleep in the field. When he awoke the next morning he saw a very nice house full of many kinds of delicious foods and beautiful clothes, which made him the richest man in the valley.

The rich merchant heard about him, visited, and asked, "How did you get so rich?"

The boy naively replied, "My friends the monkey, the mouse, and the bear gave me a long stone. If I pray to it, I get what I prayed for the next day."

The merchant said, "Let's do business. If you give me the stone I'll give you whatever you need." Then the rich merchant took the stone, despite the boy's protests, returned home, and prayed to become even richer. The next day he woke up surrounded by riches, and decided to pray that the things the stone had given the boy would come to him.

The next day when the boy woke up, all his possessions had vanished and he was sleeping in a field. He sat and wept in the empty field.

The monkey, the bear, and the mouse came and asked, "What happened to you? We made you the richest man in the valley. Why are you wailing like this?"

The boy said, "The rich merchant took my stone and all my property. Now I have nothing."

The mouse said, "We can't let you remain here like this. We need to find the stone. Tell us where the rich merchant lives."

The boy led them to the rich merchant's house and the mouse said, "You three hide here. I'll go listen to what they are talking about." The mouse then went to every place in the house but no one was talking about the stone. Then he

went to the well near the gate where many women had gathered to fetch water and wash clothes. They were talking about the boy.

One woman said, "Did you hear that a few days ago the rich merchant threw a boy into the river?"

Another woman said, "But no one knows what kind of person that boy really is. He built a big house in one day and became the richest person in this valley overnight."

Another woman asked, "How did he get so rich so quickly?"

The woman replied, "Well, he had a magic stone, but the rich merchant took it from him. That's why the whole village has become much richer."

The women talked, washed clothes, and ate puffed barley. After a few seconds, another woman asked, "What does the stone look like?"

The servant of the rich merchant said, "It's an ordinary-looking long stone."

The same woman asked, "Where did they put it?"

The rich merchant's servant said, "The stone is in the center of a room in the east of the house that is full of grain and colorful cloth. The rich merchant prays to it and the next day he receives whatever he asked for."

The mouse returned to his three friends and happily reported, "The stone is in a storeroom in the east of the house."

The monkey and the mouse went to the east side of the building, but they could not enter the room. The mouse then dug a hole into the room and got inside. He saw the stone in the center of the room, but could not go near it because the rich family had tied a cat near the stone. The mouse ran back to the monkey and said, "There's a cat near the long stone so I can't go near it."

They discussed what they should do to get the stone back. The mouse was the cleverest and suggested that he



would go to the bedroom of the rich merchant and his wife that night, and chew off all their hair.

The next day the mouse went to the well to listen to the women. One woman said, "Last night a mouse chewed off the rich merchant and his wife's hair. Tonight they're going to tie a cat near their bed." The mouse then returned to his friends and happily reported what he had heard.

That night the mouse and monkey again came to the east room. The mouse looked into the hole he had dug the night before, and saw that the cat had gone, but the stone had been put atop a pile of grain. The mouse returned to the monkey and said, "The stone is on top of the grain. I can't reach it."

The monkey said, "Dig out grain from the bottom of the pile. Eventually the stone will fall to the ground and we won't need to climb on top of the grain."

The mouse went back to the room and dug and dug though the middle of the night, until finally the stone fell to the floor. This presented another problem because the stone was too heavy for him to move. He ran back to the monkey and said, "The stone is too heavy. I can't move it. What should we do next?"

The monkey said, "Tie a rope around the stone, give the other end to me, and I'll pull the stone out. You also must make the hole in the wall bigger because the stone is too big to pull out through a small hole."

The mouse widened the hole from inside the room, and the monkey dug at the hole from outside. When they had made the hole big enough, the mouse tied a rope around the stone, took the other end of the rope to the monkey, and the monkey pulled the stone out, picked it up, and ran back to the bear and the boy.

The monkey and the mouse said to the bear and the boy, "Let's go to the other side of the river."

The boy and the bear agreed. When they got to the

river, the mouse was exhausted because he had worked for many nights. He climbed into the bear's ear and fell asleep. The monkey climbed on the bear's back, and held the stone in his mouth, keeping it steady with his two hands. The boy also climbed up on the bear's back and then the bear waded into the river.

When they reached the middle of the river, the bear asked, "Am I very strong?" because he had carried all of them.

No one answered. The mouse was asleep in the bear's ear and had heard nothing. The monkey was using his hands and mouth to hold the stone and could not speak.

The bear angrily said, "Am I strong? If you think so please say, 'Yes'. If you don't think so please say, 'No', otherwise I'll throw you both into the river."

The monkey was afraid so he threw up his arms and said, "Oh yes! You are very strong!" and then the stone fell into the river.

When they got to the other side of the river the mouse woke up. His friends told him what had happened. The mouse then told the others to sit and wait for him, and then he began wailing loudly as he ran upstream to the source of the river. He wailed up and down the river until the animals and fish of the river came and asked, "What happened to you? Why are you crying?"

The mouse said, "The river will dry up in seven days, and all living things in the river will die. This is why I'm so upset and wailing."

The living things in the river were very worried and asked, "What can we do?"

The mouse said, "We need to make a stupa of stones on the side of the river to stop this sad thing from happening."

The living things of the river were very afraid and said, "Of course we will make a stupa if it will stop the river

from drying."

The mouse happily said, "Please bring stones from the river and I'll build the stupa for you." All the living things of the river brought stones from the river. Eventually a very old frog brought the long stone to the mouse.

The mouse built the stupa and said, "Now we have made the stupa and you don't need to be afraid. The river will not dry up."

The mouse gave the stone to the boy, and then the boy's three friends said, "Now we have repaid our debt of gratitude. Go and live a happy life by yourself, take care of your stone, and don't lose it again." And then the three friends left.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

*A jo* ཨ་ཇོ

Dkar mdzes དཀར་མཛེས་ 甘孜

Dpen zen དཔེན་ཟེན་

*jo bo* ཇོ་བོ་

*lha khang nyi ma dgur shar* ལྷ་ཁང་ཉི་མ་དགུར་ཤར་

Lha sa ལྷ་ས་ 拉萨

Mching nges མཚིང་ངེས་

Mdzo 'dar མཛོ་འདར་ 绒达

Phu ma ཕུ་མ་ 普马

*ra ka gtag* ར་ཀ་གཏག་

Sde dge སྡེ་དགེ་ 德格

*sgo gtsig drog* སྒོ་གཅིག་རྩོག་

Si khron སི་ཁྲོན་ 四川

Zla ba sgrol ma ཟླ་བ་སྒྲོལ་མ་